



Ask the Expert

Find Answers to Your Sport Medicine Questions

Dying to lose weight!

Q: *A close friend of mine is struggling with her body weight. She has tried exercise, weight loss pills and every diet you can think of with minimal success. At 47, she is careful about what she eats and exercises 5 days a week just to maintain her current bodyweight. Someone suggested she try a miracle weight loss product called DNP. Have you heard of this product and are there any safety concerns? Concerned*

A: Dear Concerned - Dinitrophenol or DNP is an industrial chemical used to make things such as antiseptics, explosives, pesticides, herbicides and wood preservatives. Its potential as a weight loss agent was accidentally discovered during WWI munitions factory workers were observed to be losing weight. DNP was introduced as a weight loss agent in the USA in the 1930's and was quickly taken off the market because it caused significant and potentially fatal side effects.

Despite being considered unsafe for human consumption, DNP is now being sold as a weight loss agent on the black market. It comes in several forms: yellow powder, yellow crystals, capsules and as a cream. DNP is being used primarily by body builders who want to look "Ripped" and people who are trying to lose some unwanted pounds.

DNP works by making one of the body's energy production systems very inefficient and the energy being wasted is lost as body heat. To compensate for this inefficiency, the body is forced to fuel its operations by burning fat stores. While this sounds great, DNP has been shown to cause a very high incidence of side effects which include: potentially fatal increases in body temperature, profuse sweating, fatigue, insomnia, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, dehydration, electrolyte depletion, restlessness, flushed skin, rapid breathing, rapid heart rate, head ache, shortness of breath and cataracts.

An additional concern is that the dose of DNP needed to produce weight loss is very close to the lethal dosage for this substance. Unfortunately, once you have taken more DNP than your body can handle, there is no known antidote for this substance. To date, there are over 60 published deaths attributable to its use.

The bottom line: Please advise your friend that DNP is not a miracle weight loss drug - it is a very dangerous industrial chemical that is unsafe for human consumption. Unfortunately, as long as this product continues to be used, people will literally be dying to lose weight. Exercise is medicine! Dr. Darrell Menard MD Dip Sport Med

Dr. Darrell Menard is the Surgeon General's specialist advisor in sport medicine. He has worked extensively with athletes from multiple sports and has covered Canadian teams competing at multiple games including the 2012 Olympics and the 2016 Paralympic games. These articles were originally published in the Canadian Forces Journal, the Maple Leaf.

The Content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read on this page.

