A Threat to Health Equity

Weight-loss supplements are dangerous.

With limited FDA oversight, some dietary supplements laced with banned pharmaceuticals, steroids, and other toxic ingredients [1-4].

Annual revenue of U.S. weight-loss supplement industry = $2.56 billion [5].

23,000 ER visits per year in U.S. due to supplements [6] – 25% of these sold for weight loss – which may result in organ failure, heart attack, stroke, and death [1-4].

According to the FDA adverse event reporting system, weight-loss supplements are 3x more likely to cause severe medical injury than vitamins [7].

Youth who use over-the-counter (OTC) diet pills are 6x more likely to be diagnosed with an eating disorder within 3 years than nonusers [8].

Immigrants with low English proficiency at higher risk of not understanding FDA alerts/recalls on supplements compared to those with high English proficiency [10].

Weight-loss supplements worsen health inequities.

Among adults trying to lose weight, unacceptable inequities in lifetime use of harmful weight-loss supplements:

African American 49%
Latinx 42%
White 31%

Women have twice the risk as men [9].

Uninsured adults 3x more likely to use harmful weight-loss supplements than insured adults [10].

Latinx teens 40% more likely to use OTC diet pills than white teens [11].

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, African-American adults 3x more likely than white adults to start using weight-loss supplements [12].

Uninsured adults 3x more likely to use harmful weight-loss supplements than insured adults [10].

Women have twice the risk as men [9].

People in households with annual income less than $40,000 at higher risk than those with higher income [9].

People with high school education or less at higher risk than those with higher education [9].

Find out more about the dangers of weight-loss supplements and threats to health equity at: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped/out-of-kids-hands/


