

Weight-loss hormone hCG gains popularity, critics

By [CINDY UKEN Of The Gazette Staff](#) | Posted: Monday, July 4, 2011 12:00 am | [\(7\) Comments](#)



JAMES WOODCOCK/Gazette Staff

Dr. Margaret Beeson, medical director of the Yellowstone Naturopathic Clinic, shows a vial of Human Chorionic Gonadotropin, commonly referred to as hCG, a hormone produced in the pituitary gland. hCG is believed to help people lose weight from their stored fat if they are also following a low calorie diet. Patients are equipped with a kit of syringes they use to self-inject the hormone.

For more information

Yellowstone Naturopathic Clinic will offer classes free to public to learn about hCG weight loss therapy. For more information call the clinic at 406-259-5096 or visit the clinic's web site at www.yncnaturally.com

Christene Irigaray is a believer — and a thin one at that.

The 58-year-old woman had battled the bulge for years and always found herself on the losing end of the struggle. Weary of staring at numbers that had surpassed the 200-pound mark on the scale and frustrated with her stalled dieting efforts, the 5-foot, 6-inch woman from Buffalo, Wyo., resolved on New Year's Day 2011 to get rid of her size 18 pants.

And, she did.

Today, she weighs 157, more than 52 pounds lighter than on New Year's Day. She's traded in her pants for a size 10 and has cleared her closet of "fat clothes."

"I was so excited to get started," Irigaray said.

She is one of thousands who have pinned their hopes of a svelte silhouette to a diet that promises rapid weight loss — up to 30 pounds a month. It's called hCG weight-loss therapy or the hCG diet, and it is enjoying a surge in popularity. The plan combines drops or injections of human chorionic gonadotropin, a hormone made by the placenta during pregnancy, with a 500-calorie-a-day diet.

HCG triggers the hypothalamus to mobilize stored, or reserve, fat into the bloodstream to be used as "food" 24/7, allowing the body to consume stored fat as energy. That said, hCG by itself doesn't actually cause the fat loss, said Dr. Margaret Beeson, medical director at Yellowstone Naturopathic Clinic in Billings where hCG weight-loss therapy is offered. The bulk of your calories during the program come from the release of these fat cells (internal calories), not from what you eat (external calories).

Giving the body 500 "external" calories supplies the basic sustenance to sustain the muscle mass, Beeson said. The "internal" calories liberated by the hCG provide the additional 1,500 to 2,000 calories you need for well-being.

"This is why you feel satisfied on this program even though your food intake is drastically reduced," Beeson said.

The average person on the program loses a pound a day.

Irigaray has spent about \$1,500 out of pocket on her new figure at Yellowstone Naturopathic Clinic, losing on average a half-pound to a pound each day. She learned about hCG on the Internet. Her goal was to both look and feel better. She now champions the diet to anyone who will listen.

"It was worth every penny," she said. "I didn't want to take a chance on surgery. I've seen too many people get sick. I didn't trust the idea of surgery."

A 23-day cycle of hCG therapy at Yellowstone Naturopathic Clinic costs \$725; a 43-day supply sells for \$954. A second 23-day cycle will cost \$600 and a second 43-day cycle runs \$790. Irigaray purchased two of the 43-day cycles to reach her desired weight.

Beeson acknowledged that hCG weight-loss therapy is gaining critical mass.

"Diets have always been big business," she said.

Beeson has practiced in Billings for 20 years and said her initial reaction to hCG weight-loss therapy was negative. After doing more research and discussing it with a trusted colleague, she began offering it in April 2010. To date, 85 patients have sought the therapy. The majority of those have lost 20 to 40 pounds. A recent internal and informal survey Beeson said she conducted indicated that one of those had gained back 5 pounds.

Though hCG weight-loss therapy is a small part of her clinic, Beeson said she did not want to get involved in anything "negative" or "untoward." And, she does not want a reputation of being a "weight-loss" clinic.

"We offer it in the context of people being committed to their health," Beeson said. "Our interest is the overall health of our patients. Offering hCG in the context of what we do is a healthy step."

Dr. Lorraine Maita, president and medical director of the New Jersey-based How to Live Younger, uses the hCG diet as a solution for some of her weight-loss patients, but warns that it is not suitable for everyone and should be done under the care of a qualified physician.

The hormone itself is approved as a prescription treatment for infertility and other conditions, though the FDA has not approved it for weight loss. As with many diets, there are potential risks. The hormone is known to cause headaches, blood clots, temporary thinning of the hair, constipation and breast tenderness.

Detractors say a 500-calorie-per-day diet borders on malnutrition. Federal dietary guidelines recommend more than three times that amount for women ages 19 to 30. Other side effects of extremely low-calorie diets include bone and muscle loss, electrolyte imbalances, gallstones and even death.

Dr. Brian Arcement, medical director of the Florida-based NuViva Medical Weight Loss, said there are no substantiated medical studies to prove the effectiveness of hCG, but many dieters are reporting "real and sustainable results" while they incorporate their use of hCG with better nutrition and exercise.

"While we lack the empirical data, new anecdotal data comes in every day, and now it's being examined closely in the media as well as some new studies," Arcement said.

He said the hormone has gotten a "bad rap" from those who don't correctly use it. He said the only way of controlling the proper amount of hCG is to use only an injectable hCG that a medical professional administers.

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