

## Gel drink could help with weight loss: study

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By Anne Harding

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - An experimental beverage that turns to gel in the stomach could help some obese and overweight women cut down on their food intake.

The product "could serve as an aid for weight loss, but we wouldn't expect that one product alone would be sufficient to induce long-term weight loss," Dr. Christine L. Pelkman of the University at Buffalo in New York, the study's lead researcher, told Reuters Health.

McNeil Nutritionals, the Fort Washington, Pennsylvania company that developed the beverage, funded the study. At present, the beverage is not commercially available.

Pelkman and her team evaluated the effects of the beverage, which was developed to help people lose weight by making them feel full and slowing nutrient absorption. The drink consists of two parts; a blend of alginate-pectin and a solution containing calcium, which mix in the stomach to form a gel.

Twenty-nine overweight or obese women participated in the study, consuming three different formulations of the beverage: one containing 2.8 grams of fiber, one with 1.0 gram of fiber, and a control beverage that didn't contain fiber. The women drank the beverage at breakfast and at mid-afternoon. Each woman tested each formulation for a week, with a week long "washout" period in between.

The women also completed questionnaires to evaluate their attitudes toward food, including their level of "rigid restraint," or how much they allowed their eating to be controlled by self-imposed rules and regulations.

None of the women reported having any change in their appetite. Women who scored the lowest on levels of rigid restraint consumed about 12 percent fewer calories a day when they drank the 2.8-gram formulation of the beverage, the researchers found. However, those who scored the highest had no change in their calorie consumption with either drink formulation.

"They didn't respond at all to the beverage, they ate the same amount no matter what. They're not paying attention to their physiological signals -- that's our theory of why this happens," Pelkman said.

No serious side effects were seen with either beverage formulation, she noted, and some women actually reported feeling more regular, possibly because they were consuming more fiber.

According to Pelkman, the beverage and similar products could offer a promising adjunct for people who are trying to lose weight, or maintain weight loss.

"We can use food to trick the body and engage the satiety mechanisms that are already there, rather than using drugs that target the brain. This just uses your gut to signal your brain, and that's a very safe, modest approach," she said. "It's going to produce small results but they can

be sustained over a long period of time safely, and that's really exciting I think."

While it's not clear if McNeil is planning to put the gel beverage she studied on the market, Pelkman added, "the food industry is keenly interested in producing satiety-inducing foods."

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