



Diet ad scams easily reported to U.S. agency

THE TV AD was so convincing. It claimed, "clinically proven to decrease body fat, active ingredient issued a patent for weight loss, rid your body of excess fat without dangerous surgery, use only for serious weight problems, natural, etc., etc." The individuals giving testimonial claims seemed so sincere and honest.

You sent your \$29.95 to the company and used the two-month supply of the product and experienced zero weight loss. There was a money-back guarantee. But is it worth the hassle for \$29.95? Most people won't bother, and if they do try, they are likely to find long waits on the phone to get to the person who handles refunds, if such a person exists. But, there is another way to get some satisfaction.

Question: Ripped off? What can you do?

Answer: The consumer protection agency with the most "teeth" is the U.S. Federal Trade

Commission. The agency's charge is to protect consumers by preventing fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices and by providing information to consumers.

About two years ago, the FTC launched its "Red Flag" campaign to educate members of the media about different types of bogus weight-loss advertising claims. The FTC cautions against believing any claims that a product will cause substantial weight loss without attention to diet or exercise, cause permanent weight loss, block the absorption of calories to enable substantial weight loss, safely promote more than three pounds of weight loss per week, cause weight loss for all users or cause substantial weight loss by wearing something on the body or rubbing something into the skin.

Q: What does the FTC do when they find a company making fraudulent claims?

A: The FTC charges the com-

pany with violation of federal laws. For example, last year, the FTC charged TV marketers of a weight-loss product line of supplements with misleading claims that violated federal laws. The marketers included FiberThin LLC and Obesity Research Institute LLC, along with various individuals. They were required to pay \$1.5 million in consumer redress.

This group currently markets products that include the brand names FiberThin, Propolene and Lipozene. Their claims have changed to meet the settlement prohibitions.

Don't be fooled by wild "scientific" promises. But if you do get fooled, it's easy to file an FTC complaint. Either go to www.ftc.gov or call 877-FTC-HELP, toll free. Then, sit back and let the FTC do its job.

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