

# \*HOODIA - A PROMISING WEIGHT LOSS ALTERNATIVE

By Mike King

Hoodia Gardonii is one of the buzzwords in weight loss and alternative networks. Wouldn't you like to take a pill that kills your appetite, attacks obesity and has no known side effects? One of my close friends, Dr. Stephen Holt MD, PhD. has professed the extraordinary properties of Hoodia in his recent book *Supreme Properties of Hoodia Gardonii*. In this book he states, "Hoodia carries a special promise for appetite control and decreased caloric intake, resulting in weight loss." In fact, many are claiming Hoodia to be a revolutionary approach to wellness.

Up to 30,000 years ago the San Bushman of the Kalahari Desert in Southern Africa, one of the world's oldest and most primitive tribes, were using Hoodia for appetite control and sustenance during nomadic hunting expeditions. The Western World first discovered Hoodia in 1937, when a Dutch anthropologist noticed the use by the San Bushman. In the 1960's scientists at the laboratory of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSRI) of South Africa decided to study the effects of Hoodia in laboratory animals. These early studies showed that Hoodia reduced food intake and resulted in weight loss, yet the animals remained quite healthy. When they tested Hoodia they discovered the plant contained a previously unknown sterol glycoside molecule now called P57. In 1998 CSRI sold a license to their patent on Hoodia constituents to the English biopharmaceutical company Phytopharm PLC, which tried to sub license to Pfizer. Pfizer then tried to obtain all rights to patent extracts for \$32 million, but patent problems and extraction problems ensued. Unilever now states that it holds patent rights to the extracts. The giant food retailer has shown great interest in Hoodia as an additive, especially for their product Slimfast®. Retail products may reach the market as early as 2008. Expected sales are predicted to reach almost one billion dollars worldwide.

Hoodia plants are spiny in appearance and resemble a cactus, but it is actually a succulent, not a cactus, from a family of botanicals called *Asclepiadaceae*. Succulents are plants that are full of juice and have fleshy tissues that conserve water. There are at least 2,000 species of *Asclepiadaceae* half of which are succulents. There may be more than 20 different species of Hoodia. Found in the semi-desert regions of South Africa and Namibia, Hoodia Gardonii is the prized plant with the best properties. Unfortunately, it is hard to grow outside its normal habitat in South Africa and needs to mature at least five years to develop enough biologically active compounds (sterol glycosides) to suppress hunger. Many companies sell what they call "pure Hoodia" that is actually adulterated with fillers or even a lesser effective species. I personally know Dr. Holt buys pure true Hoodia Gardonii directly from Africa, and Now Foods brand sells a laboratory-tested product. There are many scams and inferior products on the market so be careful!

How does Hoodia Work? Within the mid brain there is a structure called the Hypothalamus. The hypothalamus controls sensations of hunger and satiety and acts as a switch box for these feelings. There are nerve cells that actually sense glucose sugar and when you eat these cells start firing and tell you that you are full. Hoodia contains a molecule called a sterol glycoside that is about 10,000 times as active as glucose. So

when you eat enough Hoodia, anywhere from 200mg to 1000mg per day, the brain becomes fooled and you “feel” full. This is especially helpful for individuals who are “emotional eaters.” Dr. Holt claims “Hoodia is a potential adjunct to behavior modification for weight control.” There are newer formulas with fat burning compounds such as green tea polyphenol extracts, caffeine and/or chromium picolinate.

In April 2004, an important article was published in the scientific journal *Brain Research*. Researchers from Brown Medical School in Providence, RI organized the first clinical trials on a species of “poor” (fat and thin) rats that will eat almost anything. There was a rapid onset of decreased food intake and major weight loss. The experiment was repeated in “Zucker” or (fat bred) rats and again the same appetite and weight loss results were reported. Since rats will eat almost anything and they will even gorge themselves to a degree of excess, according to Dr. Holt, “Knocking out the appetite or hunger drive of a rat is a dramatic event!” When the first clinical trial on 20 morbidly obese individuals was done, again amazing results were noted. After fifteen days the Hoodia group had reduced their food intake by 1000 calories. It should be noted that Hoodia has a “loading” effect, which means it takes time for the supplement to reach an effective load, or level in the body for desired effects. In the case of Hoodia it takes about 2 weeks for the maximum appetite loss effect.

Hoodia has also been reported to provide a sense of increased alertness, and energy levels. Interestingly, Hoodia has been used to aid in stomach upset and heartburn, which is similarly common in individuals who overeat and are overweight. It is also known to be a mild-antidepressant, aphrodisiac and to reduce hangovers. There have been no known reports of Hoodia being dangerous or having harmful side effects. It has been used for thousands of years and can even be found sold as a produce item in South Africa. Dr. Holt does warn that even though Hoodia may be at great potential as a weight loss aid, it is just that, an aid. It should also be used in conjunction with a healthy diet and proper exercise for maximum results.

*\*This information is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.*