

Press release

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Thin protection for slimmers

Advertisements for slimming products and services contain unsubstantiated marketing hype, misleading claims, or else fail to provide essential information, says Sustain in the latest edition of its campaign journal *Adwatch*. Sustain has conducted research into adverts for slimming products and services appearing in women's magazines and believes that the vast majority breach the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion's specific rules for slimming. [1]

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the regulatory body which aims to ensure that print advertising is "legal, decent, honest and truthful." Sustain is calling upon the ASA to:

1. adjudicate on complaints made about misleading slimming claims on companies' websites. The ASA will not consider complaints against promotional content appearing on company websites, even when consumers are directed to these sites in print advertisements. [2]
2. take a stronger position on the regulation of misleading claims appearing in slimming advertisements and promotions. For example:
 - even though the ASA acknowledges that magazine advertisements often find their way into doctors' and dentists' waiting rooms, they will not consider complaints about inaccurate, untruthful or unsubstantiated adverts which are more than 12 weeks old.
 - in spite of assurances to the contrary, ASA adjudications may focus only on the specific complaint received, whilst overlooking other potentially misleading aspects of the advertisement.
3. impose a pre-vetting system for all slimming promotions, which would require publishers to check slimming advertisements before publication. This provision existed under the 1988 version of the codes on slimming advertising, but was dropped in 1995. [3]

Charlie Powell, Project Officer at *Sustain*, commented, “*Whilst companies promoting slimming products and services often generate huge profits by misleading vulnerable slimmers, the current system of advertising self-regulation routinely fails to provide any protection.*”

Notes

- [1] A commentary on recent slimming complaints submitted to the ASA is given in *Adwatch* (No.19, December 2001), *Sustain's Food Labelling and Marketing Newsletter*. *Adwatch* is a tri-yearly publication, which highlights ethically suspect advertising, marketing and promotional practices. Annual subscription is £30 - tel: 020 7837 1228.
- [2] Examples of misleading Internet slimming product promotions can be found in *The Food Magazine*, Issue 56, Jan/Mar 2002, published by the Food Commission – Tel: 020 7837 2250.
- [3] ‘*Slim Hopes*’, a survey of slimming advertising, conducted by *Sustain* in 1995, found that 88% of advertisements for slimming services and products were in breach of the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion. Copies of *Slim Hopes* are available, price £25, from *Sustain* on tel: 020 7837 1228. The ASA’s own survey in 1995, also found unacceptable levels of misleading slimming advertising.

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agricultural policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent over 100 public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local levels. To find out more about *Sustain's* work, visit www.sustainweb.org

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