

TRUE – FALSE – NOT GIVEN PRACTICE

PRACTICE 1

The Quest for Beauty

While skin bleaching is a long-standing cosmetic staple across Sudan, a newer craze is sweeping the nation. Many young women are turning to prescription pills in order to gain weight, and hopefully gain the curvaceous figures they see as the standard of beauty. Away from the regulation of trained pharmacists, fattening pills are illegally dispensed by the same small shops which sell topical bleaching creams and other popular beauty fixes. Sold individually, in small bags and emptied sweet containers, they are completely devoid of any information about medical risks.

- 1. People do not get any information about the dangers to their health when they purchase unregulated weight gain pills.*

It is difficult to estimate how many women in Sudan use these products to gain weight, because many are reluctant to admit to it. "Pills are handed out in the village like penny sweets," says Imitithal Ahmed, a student at the University of Khartoum. "I've always been scared to use them because I've seen family members fall ill and close friends become dependent on appetite stimulants. My aunt is on the brink of kidney failure and has blocked arteries from taking too many fattening pills, trying to get a bigger bum. Everyone in the family knows why she's sick, but she won't own up to it. She's had to stop taking the pills on doctor's orders."

- 2. Since a large number of women in Sudan are not willing to reveal that they take the pills, the exact number of women using them is not known.*

Pills are often rebranded and given catchy street names which allude to their effects. From The Neighbours' Shock to Chicken Thighs and My Mama Suspects, the clinical name of pills are forgotten and replaced by promises of a bigger bottom, shapely thighs and a belly that will have your mother concerned that you might be pregnant. Tablets range from standard appetite stimulants to allergy medicines containing the steroid hormone, cortisone. The side-effects of taking cortisone are now a cash cow for pill peddlers. It is known to slow the metabolism, increase appetite, trigger water retention and create extra deposits of fat around the abdomen and face.

- 3. Promoting the clinical name of the pills helps the sellers to focus on the weight gaining aspects associated with them.*

- 4. Those selling the pills are making more money on them than other types of pills.*

Using unregulated steroids without supervision can damage the heart, liver, kidneys and thyroid, says Dr Salah Ibrahim, Head of the Pharmacists' Union in Sudan. He explains that cortisone is a naturally occurring hormone in the body, helping to regulate vital bodily functions. But when a man-made,

concentrated version enters the body in the form of pills or topical bleaching creams, the brain gives the body a signal to stop production. If a user suddenly stops taking the substance, their major organs can spiral into dysfunction.

5. The body's cortisone production will eventually return to normal once a person stops taking the pills.

Young women in Sudan are dying from kidney and heart failure caused by sudden steroid withdrawal, medical professionals say. Fatalities are especially common among new brides, who traditionally undergo a month of intense beautification prior to their wedding day and then abruptly stop using fattening pills and steroid bleaching creams. Their deaths are put down to sudden organ failure.

6. Intense usage in the month after marriage followed by sudden withdrawal is resulting in a high death rate for newly-wed women.

Yet these horrifying beauty trends continue to gain traction. Prescription pill abuse is taking off in Sudan's conservative society, partly because it lacks the social stigma and pungent, giveaway odour of alcohol and cannabis. University students flock to buy the potent painkiller Tramadol, which is sold for 20 Sudanese pounds (\$1; 80 pence) per pill. Some of Khartoum's roadside tea-sellers are even known to drop the painkiller in a cup of tea, upon a coded request.

7. Sudanese society does not view the abuse of prescription pills as negatively as it does other drugs such as alcohol and cannabis.

Awareness campaigns have so far had very little impact. Dr Ibrahim, Head of the Pharmacists Union, has made numerous appearances on national television to warn of the dangers of prescription pill abuse. At university level, pharmacists are taught vigilance and trained to act in keeping with ethics and pharmaceutical law. But in a country where pharmacists and doctors are paid very little, the temptation to sell pills to illegal vendors is overwhelming for some. "Last time I went to the beauty shop I go to for my creams, the shop owner brought out a chocolate box full of different fattening pills," says Ms Ahmed, the Khartoum student. "Girls are too scared to ask pharmacists and doctors about the pills they buy from beauty shops, for fear of being publicly shamed."

7. Awareness campaigns are becoming common on national television.

8. The low pay of doctors and pharmacists contributes to the problem of weight pill abuse.

Police may arrest traders and block smuggling routes, but the profits for rogue pharmacists keep growing regardless. Fattening pills are poured into the black market, deemed to be the lesser evil. Sudan isn't the only African society where being overweight is a symbol of prosperity and power, boosting the "marriageability" of young women. But in this country, it embodies an ideal. It defines the ultimate Sudanese woman - full-bodied and light-skinned - epitomising beauty and coveted as a

wife. The iconic status of Nada Algala, a Sudanese singer whose looks are widely praised and emulated, is testament in itself. For some women, it is an ideal to be acquired by any means necessary.

9. Being overweight is a sign of prosperity and power throughout African countries.

PRACTICE 2

THE BRISTOL INTERNATIONAL BALLOON FIESTA

The Bristol International Balloon Fiesta is held annually in England. Teams from the UK and other parts of the world bring their hot air balloons to the site and participate in mass ascents where as many as 100 balloons may launch at a time.

The event was first held in 1979 and is now one of the largest in Europe. It is common to have crowds of over 100,000 on each of the four days of the festival. It takes place in a large country estate Ashton Court. Mass launches are made twice a day, at 6am and 6pm, subject to weather conditions.

One popular attraction is the night glow, when balloons are inflated and glow to music after dark. These are held on the opening Thursday night at approximately 9:30pm, followed by a spectacular fireworks display. There is another night glow at the same time followed by the fireworks on the Saturday night. Some people see these as the highlight of the fiesta.

The balloon makers Cameron Balloons are near to the fiesta site, in Bedminster, and make many of the special shaped balloons, which have included Rupert the Bear, The Scottish Piper, Bertie Bassett, the Tesco Trolley, Stuart the Minion, and the BBC One Balloon. Many interestingly shaped balloons have also attended the fiesta from abroad, over the years a UFO and a beaver have travelled from the USA, a kiwi bird from New Zealand, and an upside down balloon from the Netherlands.

In the past, the fiesta used to be held in the second week of September, but due to cancellations of flights and the muddy ground because of bad weather, it has been moved in the start of August. This has had a great effect as more flights manage to fly; cancellations are now normally due to high winds.

In 2003, the weight of crowds returning from the Balloon Fiesta and Ashton Court festival put such a great strain on the Clifton Suspension Bridge that it was decided to close the bridge to all traffic, including pedestrians, during these events from 2004 onwards.

In recent years, the event has diversified to include small scale air displays, attracting the likes of The Blades, Typhoon display team and the Red Arrows.

On 10 August 2013 the festival broke a balloon fiesta record after 74 balloons landed in one field near the former Somerdale Factory in Keynsham. The record was then broken a year later, when 90 balloons again landed in the former Cadbury's chocolate factory on 9 August.

- 1. The largest mass balloon ascent ever occurred at the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta.*
- 2. If the meteorological situation is acceptable, then more than one mass launch of balloons can occur per day.*

3. A night glow event takes place on each evening of the festival.
4. One company is responsible for all of the balloons at the festival.
5. The festival benefits from being moved to an earlier time in the year.
6. The decision to close the Clifton suspension bridge in 2003 was made by the local traffic police.
7. Different kinds of events have been introduced at the festival in the recent years.
8. Since 2013 the festival has broken records every year.