



Slow Italian, Fast Learning

Ep.418: Unapproved Peptides: When Social Media Replaces the Doctor

Italian	English
<p>Forse avete già sentito parlare dei peptidi: composti iniettabili che promettono una rapida perdita di peso, effetti anti-tensione e una pelle abbronzata.</p> <p>È possibile ordinarli online: basta una rapida ricerca su Google o semplicemente cliccare su un link nel post del vostro influencer preferito, e una confezione di piccole fiale vi verrà spedita direttamente a casa vostra.</p> <p>Da lì, basta semplicemente iniettarle nel corpo: non servono né un medico né una prescrizione.</p> <p>Ma molte di queste sostanze non sono approvate per l'uso umano, e farete fatica a trovare prove cliniche a loro sostegno.</p> <p>Eppure sono ovunque: invadono i feed dei social media e le comunità del benessere, entrando a far parte della routine quotidiana delle persone.</p> <p>E non sono più solo gli atleti o i bodybuilder a sperimentare queste sostanze, ma anche persone comuni, che stanno imparando sempre più spesso come farlo online.</p> <p>Allora, cosa è cambiato e perché le persone sono disposte a correre questo rischio?</p> <p>Per capire cosa sta guidando questo fenomeno, SBS ha parlato con il dottor Timothy Piatkowski della Queensland University, che sta monitorando questo settore.</p>	<p>You may have heard of peptides - injectable compounds promising rapid fat loss, anti-ageing, and tanned skin.</p> <p>You can order them online, a quick Google search, or simply click a link on your favourite influencer's post, and a box of small vials can be shipped straight to your doorstep.</p> <p>From there, it's as simple injecting into the body - no doctor, no prescription needed.</p> <p>But many of these substances aren't approved for human use, and you'll struggle to find much clinical evidence behind them.</p> <p>And yet, they're everywhere - flooding social media feeds, wellness communities, and becoming part of people's everyday routines.</p> <p>And it's not just athletes or bodybuilders experimenting with these substances anymore, it's ordinary people, who are increasingly learning how to do it online.</p> <p>So, what's changed, and why are people willing to take the risk?</p> <p>To understand what's driving this, SBS spoke with Dr Timothy Piatkowski from the University of Queensland who's been tracking this space.</p>

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"Generally speaking, peptides are short chains of amino acids. But I guess when we talk about peptides now in the current climate, really what people are talking about is research chemicals that you order on websites that are delivered to your doorstep that magically make you live longer or recover quicker or lose weight faster or whatever else. So with peptides, essentially, these are like freeze-dried powders that come in vials, and then people break these down with bacteriostatic water and inject them subcutaneously into their body."

Il dottor Piatkowski gestisce un programma chiamato Steroid QNECT, una linea telefonica riservata dedicata a chi fa uso di prodotti di questo tipo.

Si rivolge a persone al di fuori del mercato tradizionale che cercano consigli su come utilizzare i peptidi.

"It's really older cohorts and younger cohorts as well. So, people just wanting to live longer or feel better who are swept up in fitness influencers, advertising these products and the absolute surge of availability, especially on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok. We've got plenty of women who call the line from mothers, grandmothers who are wanting to lose weight, look younger recover quicker from an injury. And it could be like not an injury related to sport. Like maybe they fell down the stairs and they've, you know, sprained their ankle and they heard this substance is going to help them or they've recently had a surgery for whatever reason. And they've heard that this will help them recover faster."

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Dr Piatkowski runs a program called Steroid QNECT – a confidential phone line for people using products like these.

He's seeing people outside the typical market seeking advice on how to use peptides.

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Casey fa parte di questo gruppo in continua crescita.

Ha 41 anni, è madre di quattro figli e ora sta assumendo peptidi non approvati.

"So for me, it was weight loss to start with. So, I tried all your, you know, medicated injections which are quite substantially expensive, and I did find that they worked but I'd noticed friends of mine who had been using certain peptides, they were losing weight a lot faster but they also didn't seem lethargic. I wasn't feeling well all the time. I was really lethargic. I was quite nauseous and so that's what made me actually want to try it to see if it worked better for me with my body and it did."

L'esperienza di Casey non è insolita.

Quando i trattamenti convenzionali non sono sufficienti, le ricerche suggeriscono che le persone spesso iniziano a cercare altre alternative.

Quindi, invece di tornare alle cliniche, ai tempi di attesa e alle costose parcelle, Casey si è rivolta a qualcosa di molto più facile da trovare online.

"Where I did my research, I went down the rabbit hole via social media. So, through TikTok and things like that and Instagram and I also went through a website with the dosing. It tells you how to reconstitute and what dose to start on and things like that. So, I did do a lot of research first while it was via social media and websites but they all were saying the same thing."

Casey is part of this growing group.

She's 41, a mother of four, and she's now using unapproved peptides.

"So for me, it was weight loss to start with. So, I tried all your, you know, medicated injections which are quite substantially expensive, and I did find that they worked but I'd noticed friends of mine who had been using certain peptides, they were losing weight a lot faster but they also didn't seem lethargic. I wasn't feeling well all the time. I was really lethargic. I was quite nauseous and so that's what made me actually want to try it to see if it worked better for me with my body and it did."

Casey's experience isn't unusual.

When conventional treatments fall short, research suggests people often start searching for other alternatives.

So instead of going back to the clinics, the wait times and the expensive bills, Casey turned towards something much easier to access online.

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E quando tutto sembra andare nella stessa direzione, la situazione comincia a sembrare affidabile, come racconta Casey.

"I think when you watch someone's journey, that's what makes it more trustworthy, I think. I followed a few people's journey who had tried it or was just starting to try this particular weight loss peptide before I introduced and decided to try it."

L'idea che osservare qualcuno nel corso del tempo contribuisca a creare fiducia e credibilità è fondamentale per il funzionamento di questi spazi.

Non si tratta di autorità, ma di familiarità, come spiegano ricercatori come il dottor Piatkowski.

Egli sostiene che ciò non sia casuale, ma faccia parte di un modello più ampio che riguarda il modo in cui le persone acquisiscono conoscenze sui farmaci.

"Some of them have existed for a long time and plenty of people have used them in community and sort of documented those experiences online with each other. So that sort of ethnopharmacological or folk science transmission of knowledge or that transmission of lived experience and expertise, I think is still valuable and overlooked quite often. But we also do need human data for some of these drugs that aren't approved for human use. So that's probably a big sticking point. And then also longer-term data."

Sempre più persone acquisiscono conoscenze al di fuori dei canali tradizionali, il che riflette una tendenza sempre più diffusa ad allontanarsi dalla fiducia nella medicina convenzionale per rivolgersi alle comunità online e agli influencer.

And when everything seems to point in the same direction, it starts to feel reliable, as Casey shares.

"I think when you watch someone's journey, that's what makes it more trustworthy, I think. I followed a few people's journey who had tried it or was just starting to try this particular weight loss peptide before I introduced and decided to try it."

The idea that watching someone over time builds trust and credibility is central to how these spaces work.

Its not about authority its about familiarity, as researchers like Dr Piatkowski explain.

He says this isn't random, but in fact part of a broader pattern in how people are learning about drugs.

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More and more people are gaining knowledge outside the usual systems, reflecting a broader shift away from trust in conventional medicine, and towards online communities and influencers.



Come spiega Casey, quando le persone hanno l'impressione che le loro esigenze non vengano soddisfatte, questi spazi diventano più attraenti.

"We're taught that if you're sick, go to the doctor, take your medication. And we're now starting to go well, hang on, why do we have to? When these other alternatives are working and that are a quarter of the price."

Come per molti altri, anche per Casey la questione si è ridotta a una questione di costi, accessibilità e frustrazione nei confronti del percorso esistente.

Ma al di fuori di quel sistema non esistono norme e non c'è modo di sapere con esattezza cosa si sta assumendo.

La professoressa Robyn Langham è consulente medico capo della Therapeutic Goods Administration.

"To anyone who's living in the community, thinking of purchasing these products online, they need to be very, very aware that what they are buying may not actually be the product that it says on the label. They may also be buying something that's more unsafe with other toxins or chemicals inside them."

Allora, dove collochiamo i peptidi all'interno del sistema di regolamentazione sanitaria australiano?

"If they're selling these products without prescriptions, they are doing so illegally. And the TGA is working very hard to identify and, I guess, enforce our regulations to these organisations that are doing this. So, they're not escaping regulation when they are doing something that is illegal."

As Casey describes, when people feel like their needs aren't being met, these spaces become more appealing.

"We're taught that if you're sick, go to the doctor, take your medication. And we're now starting to go well, hang on, why do we have to? When these other alternatives are working and that are a quarter of the price."

Like many others, for Casey it came down to cost, accessibility, and a frustration with the existing pathway.

But outside that system, there are no regulations, and no way of knowing exactly what you're putting into your body.

Professor Robyn Langham is the Therapeutic Goods Administration's Chief Medical Advisor.

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So where does this sit within Australia's medical regulatory system?

"If they're selling these products without prescriptions, they are doing so illegally. And the TGA is working very hard to identify and, I guess, enforce our regulations to these organisations that are doing this. So, they're not escaping regulation when they are doing something that is illegal."



<p>Sebbene siano spesso i benefici ad attirare l'attenzione, questi prodotti non sono stati approvati e gli effetti a lungo termine rimangono sconosciuti.</p> <p>"There's a real concerning lack of published clinical trial data, because the studies that would have been started on some of these products appear to have been cancelled or stopped without any published conclusions."</p> <p>Eppure, i peptidi continuano a guadagnare popolarità, spinti dalle testimonianze, dal clamore suscitato dagli influencer e dalla promessa di miglioramenti.</p> <p>Nell'era dei social media, si registra una tensione costante tra conoscenze cliniche ed esperienza vissuta, che mette in discussione i modelli sanitari tradizionali e ridefinisce le figure a cui le persone scelgono di affidare la propria salute.</p>	<p>While the benefits are often what gets the attention, they're unapproved, and the long term effects remain unknown.</p> <p>"There's a real concerning lack of published clinical trial data, because the studies that would have been started on some of these products appear to have been cancelled or stopped without any published conclusions."</p> <p>But still, peptides continue to grow in popularity fuelled by testimonials, influencer hype and the promise of enhancement.</p> <p>In an age of social media, there's ongoing tension between clinical knowledge and lived experience, challenging traditional health models and redefining who people choose to trust with their health.</p>
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Report by Blake Quinn for SBS News.

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