

Assessing Claims made by Weight-Loss and Nutrient Supplement Companies

Key Knowledge

4.1.4

Criteria used when assessing claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies, including commercial gain, ethics, and the effectiveness of the product.

Key Skills

4.1.1

Assess validity of information provided by a variety of contexts in which food knowledge and skills takes place.

4.1.2

Apply principles of research and healthy eating recommendations to assess food information.

4.1.3

Analyse the nutritional efficacy of contemporary food fads, trends and diets.

4.1.6

Demonstrate understanding of the healthy eating recommendations of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating by applying them to food selection, planning and preparation.

Terms and Definitions

Commercial gain occurs when a customer pays the price for a product or service and the business selling the product or service profits.

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that encourages people to think about their decisions. Whether their actions are right or wrong and how their behaviour impacts others.

Assessing Claims Made by Weight-Loss and Nutrient Supplement Companies

Any person considering starting a weight-loss program is advised to discuss their intentions with a General Practitioner (GP) first. A GP will determine if a person is within a healthy weight range and needs to lose weight. Further medical advice will be provided if they do need to lose weight. This advice should include eating a balanced diet and participation in regular physical activity.

People can access weight-loss services via companies. Some doctors and health care providers are also beginning to recommend people use weight-loss companies to lose weight, which is concerning.

A good weight-loss program will:

- advise clients that it is safe to lose weight slowly rather than rapidly;
- educate clients about nutritious preparation and cooking techniques;
- encourage people to eat less processed foods containing hidden fat, salt, and sugar;
- focuses on changes in body measurements and weight loss;
- help clients control portion sizes and become more mindful about overeating and how they can rectify this;
- include a variety of food from all five food groups and promote the consumption of balanced meals; and
- recommend individuals to undertake both cardio and weight-bearing exercises.



Weight-Loss Companies

Customers need to pay a fee to participate in a company-run weight-loss program. People working for these companies say they care about their clients losing weight. However, often the company's primary goal is to make a profit.

Many weight-loss companies almost always promise rapid weight loss and cut out one or more of the major food groups in their meal plans. They often fail to educate people about the importance of healthy lifestyle choices such as preparing and cooking nutritious food and the importance of regular exercise in maintaining long-term weight loss. They often recommend expensive meal replacement supplements as part of their dieting regime. They may also promote expensive treatments like body wraps to assist in weight loss.

Nutrient Supplement Companies

Ideally, people should get the nutrients their body needs from foods. However, the *Australian Dietary Guidelines* do recommend that pregnant women take a nutritional supplement to decrease the risk of having a baby with spina bifida. They also state that anyone who eliminates a food group from their diet should also take supplements; in particular, people on a vegan diet are recommended to take a vitamin B12 supplement. Other medical professionals in Australia also recommend that people at risk of osteoporosis take a vitamin D supplement. However, for most of the population, nutritional supplements are generally unnecessary.

Nutritional supplements are made from synthetic substances to imitate the chemical makeup of nutrients in food. Herbal supplements are the exception; they are made from plants. Nutritional supplements include capsules, energy bars, gummies, herbal remedies, juices, oil supplements, powders, shakes, tablets, and teas. The food industry is even beginning to add nutritional supplements to its food products.

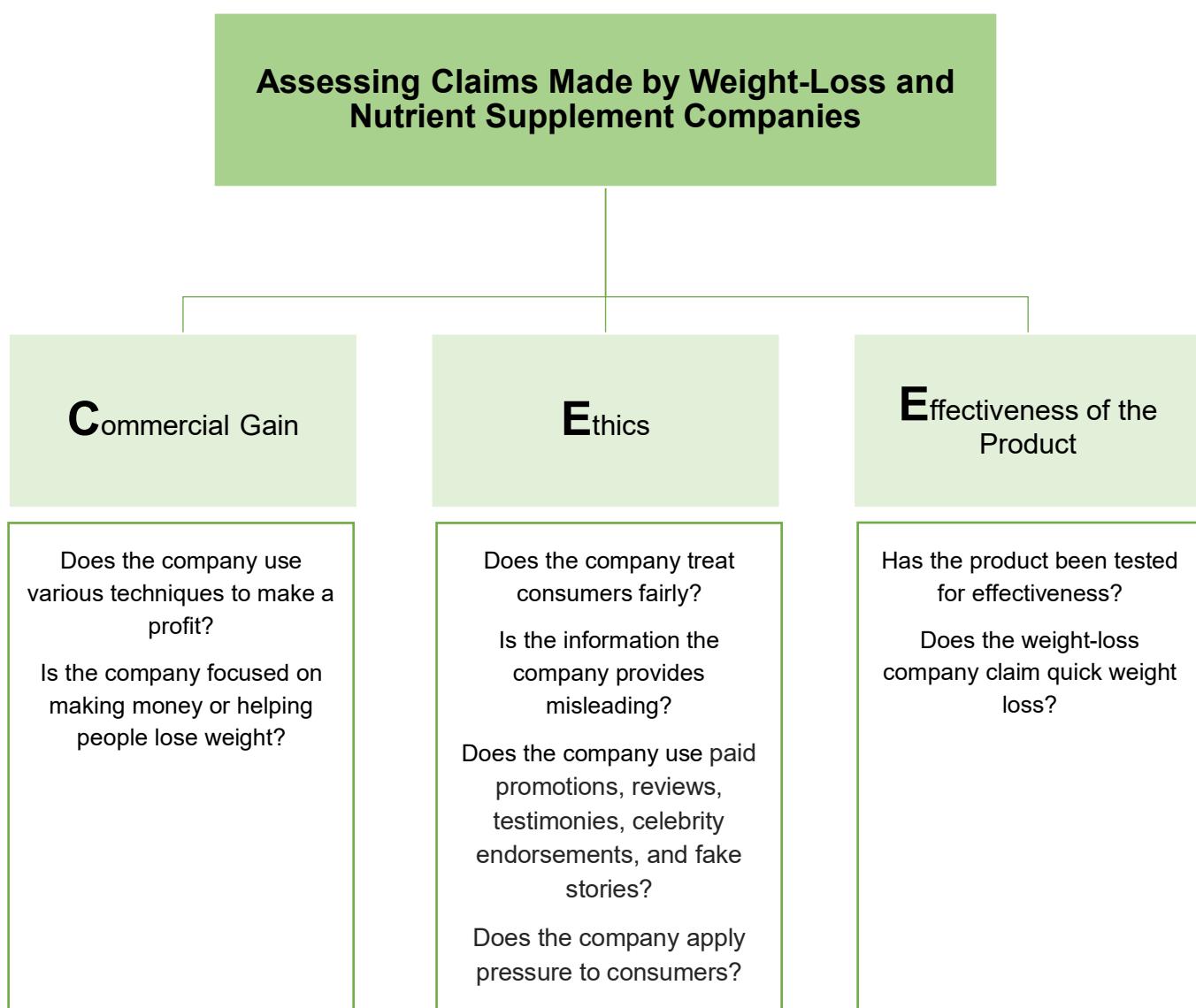
Sales of nutritional supplements in Australia are considerably high. While many people purchase these nutritional supplements from pharmacies, there is a growing trend to buy from online companies.

Watch these news reports about supplements: https://youtu.be/vv_MmSf3Kuo and <https://youtu.be/QIzmlxJeKVY>.



Assessing Claims Made by Weight-Loss and Nutrient Supplement Companies

The diagram below represents what people should look for when assessing the validity of claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies.



Commercial Gain

Nowadays, numerous commercial weight-loss products, nutritional supplements, and programs are available to consumers. Many weight-loss companies require people to pay a subscription and buy the program's foods or supplements. Additional fees may be charged for extra services or devices.

Methods that companies use to encourage people to join their weight-loss programs or buy their nutritional supplements include:

Added Extras

Some weight-loss companies make a lot of money from selling additional food products associated with their brand. For example, the Atkins diet meal plans are free. However, the foods made and branded by the Atkins company at the supermarket are not free. The Atkins company makes money by selling their branded products and nutritional supplements.

Low Start-Up Costs

Other companies may offer a low 'start-up' price that gradually increases to a much higher amount over time. Many companies hope people lack the time or effort to cancel their membership and continue paying the high price for a service they may or may not benefit from. Even when the customer eventually cancels the service, the company often inundates them with messages offering a low-cost rejoining fee.

Money-Back Guarantees

Some companies offer consumers a money-back guarantee when they sign up for their program or product. If the service fails, many consumers will be unlikely to complete the required paperwork or pay the postage to return the product. Some companies will even include the guarantee details in the fine print, which makes ceasing a service or returning an opened product difficult.

Risk-Free Trials

A common way for companies to make money from weight-loss products is to offer a 'risk-free trial.' Customers are usually promised a free sample of the weight-loss service or supplement. Upon signing up for the free product, the company requests their personal and credit card details. However, often in the terms and conditions, these companies state that customers only have minimal time to cancel the program before enrolling in a costly subscription.

The Fine Print

When signing up for any weight-loss program or nutritional supplement, consumers should read all the terms and conditions before entering any payment details. They ought to be cautious of any company that requires automated payments from a credit card or bank account and should make an effort to understand what they are signing up for.



Ethics

Weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies do not always use ethical selling techniques.

Misleading Advertising

The information provided by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies can be misleading. Companies often inform consumers about all the benefits of a product but do not educate people on the adverse effects. Companies will often recommend that customers follow a low-energy eating plan and participate in regular exercise to lose weight. However, they often do not provide information on how to follow such a plan. Weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies use various techniques to get people to buy their products and services. Some companies develop advertisements that look and read like an informative and legitimate magazine article but are actually advertisements.

Paid Promotions, Reviews, Testimonies, Celebrity Endorsements, and Fake Stories

The use of social media to promote weight-loss and nutrition supplement companies is increasing. These companies might pay influencers and people to write positive reviews, 'like' their products, and post fake stories. Sometimes, they use similar logos or company names and web addresses that look legitimate. Another tactic is the 'before and after' photos. Often these photos show images of a person who had undergone dramatic weight loss; these images may have been photoshopped or perhaps they are just photos of people who may or may not have used the product.

Often well-known celebrities are paid to promote a product on behalf of a company, personally claiming they experienced success with a product. Unfortunately, sometimes these companies use celebrities to endorse products without their written consent or approval. This is not only unethical but illegal.

Another type of testimony appearing on websites is a notification that another person has just bought the same product. This notification appears briefly and then disappears. This gives consumers confidence that the product they are buying is desirable. However, this is unethical as there is often no proof that these notifications are genuine.

Apply Pressure to Consumers

Some companies apply pressure on consumers to quickly buy their products. They often have a countdown telling the consumer how long they have before the special deal is unavailable. Frequently, they state in television and radio ads that the first consumers to ring in and order the product will get additional products for free or a special discount! These tactics are unethical because they force consumers to quickly decide without enough time to consider if they need the product or if it will do what it says it will do.

Use of Language and Images

Weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies often feature images of slim and toned women and muscly men. This can leave people feeling inadequate and that they need to lose weight to look like the people in the advertisements. These ads are unethical because they encourage people to follow fad programs to lose weight.

Manipulate Data Research

Companies often refer to research, surveys, or studies proving the product works but the data may have been manipulated. They also often refer to similar studies or products rather than the product they sell. This is considered unethical.

The Effectiveness of the Product

Tests for Effectiveness

It is difficult for Australians to thoroughly investigate whether weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies are effective and sell effective products. The Australian Government does not always test nutritional supplements and weight-loss products sold by companies for effectiveness. Many supplements fall into the category of low-risk ingredients. This means they are only subjected to testing for safety and quality and not whether these products do what they say they do.

Quick Weight Loss

Companies often promote rapid weight loss. Unfortunately, any quick weight loss that a company promotes is usually too good to be true. While the dieter may initially experience significant weight loss, it can be challenging to maintain the weight loss long term. They often regain all of the weight plus a few additional kilograms. The rapid weight-loss programs promoted by some companies are generally ineffective.

Written Activity One

Watch-out for Weight Loss Scams!

Read the media article at this link: <https://www.accc.gov.au/media-release/watch-out-for-weight-loss-scams>

In the table below, list examples of the techniques used by weight-loss and nutritional supplement companies to encourage people to buy their products.

1. **Identify** some methods weight-loss and nutritional supplement companies use to benefit financially. Why is the problem with these methods? Why might they be considered unethical?

Commercial Gain	What is the problem with these methods?

2. Identify some techniques weight-loss and nutritional supplement companies use to sell their products that may be considered unethical. Why might these techniques be considered unethical?

Ethics	Why might this be considered unethical?

3. Identify some techniques weight-loss and nutritional supplement companies use to prove that their products are effective. What is the problem with these techniques?

Effectiveness of the Product	What is the problem with these techniques?

Written Activity Two

SensaSlim

Watch the video at this link: <https://youtu.be/M2S2nq8md-Y>

1. What techniques did the company use to prove the effectiveness of the SenaSlim weight-loss product?

2. What was revealed after investigation into this product and company?

3. Why might the techniques used by SenaSlim be considered unethical?

4. What kind of techniques do companies, like SenaSlim, use to benefit gain financially from selling their products?

5. Why do you think people often seek weight-loss products such as SensaSlim?

6. Provide some dietary advice to people who are considering buying a weight-loss product.

Written Activity Three

Weight-Loss and Nutrient Supplements on the Market

In small groups, **research** one of the weight-loss or nutrient supplements listed below:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rECPJaPV56I> – Optifast
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-38MJIZUeY> – The Cookie Diet – Nutrient Supplement
- <https://www.herbalife.com.au/what-is-your-goal/healthy-weight/> - Herbalife
- <https://juiceculture.com.au/collections> - Juice Cleanse
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCoxJBUDw5Q> - FatBlaster
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1UGfofOrjY> – Body Key Program

Report your findings to the class.

Answer the following questions:

1. What tactics does this company use to commercially gain from selling their product/s?

2. What kind of ethical and/or unethical practices does this company employ? Why are these practices considered ethical and/or unethical?

3. How does this company attempt to convince consumers that their product is effective? Are these methods truthful and accurate?

Written Activity Four

Assessing Weight-Loss Meal Plans

Your task is to review a weight-loss meal plan.

1. **Search** the internet to find a weight-loss meal plan for one day.

Here are some plans that you could use:

Keto Meal Plan - <https://www.ibreatheimhungry.com/week-1-squeaky-clean-keto-meal-plan-sckc/>

Weight-loss Meal Plan - <https://sites.google.com/site/weightlosedietmealplane/>

Mediterranean Meal Plan - <https://www.olivetomato.com/authentic-mediterranean-diet-meal-plan/>

Paleo Meal Plan - <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/424464333605472729/>

2. **Provide** a link to the website where you found the meal plan.

3. **Describe** the type of diet this meal plan was designed for.

4. **Assess** the nutritional efficacy of this meal plan with the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating using the SWOT template below.

Strengths (Positive characteristics or advantages of the diet in relation to the AGtHE)	Weaknesses (Negative characteristics or advantages of the diet in relation to the AGtHE)
Opportunity (Factors that may enhance the ability of a person to follow this diet)	Threat (Factors that may hinder the ability of a person to follow this diet)

Practical Activity One

Nutritious Shake

Read the design brief below and answer the questions:

Design Brief

Sally would like a shake for breakfast that she can drink while she goes to school and lose some weight. Her mother is a dietitian and refuses to allow Sally to buy shakes to consume. The only way that she would allow Sally to have a shake for breakfast is if it contains a range of foods from the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. Her mother says she is not allowed to purchase any food fads for her shakes, and she must use the ingredients they already have in their home.

Sally had a good look in their kitchen to see what she could find. She found a blender to make the shake with and has listed the ingredients she found.

Your task is to design a nutritious shake for Sally to consume on her way to school each morning.

The shake must:

- Contain a range of foods from the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating.
- Follow the advice given in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.
- Use the ingredients they already have in their home.

Fruit	Milk	Grains	Flavourings
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 frozen banana	<input type="checkbox"/> Unsweetened Almond Milk	<input type="checkbox"/> Rolled Oats	<input type="checkbox"/> Vanilla Essence
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup frozen blueberries	<input type="checkbox"/> Lite Milk	<input type="checkbox"/> Weetbix	<input type="checkbox"/> Honey
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup frozen raspberries	<input type="checkbox"/> Lite Soy Milk	<input type="checkbox"/> Flaked Quinoa	<input type="checkbox"/> Cinnamon
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup frozen mangos	<input type="checkbox"/> Plain Greek Yoghurt	<input type="checkbox"/> Puffed Amaranth	<input type="checkbox"/> Flaked Almonds
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup frozen mangos	<input type="checkbox"/> Coconut Milk	<input type="checkbox"/> Chia Seeds	<input type="checkbox"/> Cocoa Powder

Make your Shake

Follow these instructions to make the smoothie: https://youtu.be/rp_yk7TAv00

Evaluation

- Conduct a sensory analysis to compare the commercial shake with your homemade one.

Your teacher has provided three samples of cheese.

Place a tick in the box that best represents how you feel about each food sample.

Sample	Dislike a lot	Dislike	Neither like nor dislike	Like	Like a lot
Commercial Shake					
Homemade Weight Loss Shake					

2. **Compare** the nutritional efficacy of the homemade shake with the commercial one by comparing them to each component of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating.

Component of AGtHE	Homemade Shake Assessment	Commercial Shake Assessment
Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties		
Vegetables and Legumes/ Beans		
Fruit		
Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat		
Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, and legumes/ beans		
Use small amounts		
Only sometimes and in small amounts		
Drink Water		

3. Make an overall assessment of the homemade and commercial shake.

4. **Create** a one-page advertisement for the shake that you made that outlines the effectiveness of your shake.
Use a range of techniques in your advertisement to entice people to purchase your shake.
Include only credible and ethical information is included in your advertisement!

Summary Activity

Criteria Used when Assessing Food Information

What is the main idea about this key knowledge & key skill? (Two or three sentences in your own words)
List the three criteria that should be used when assessing claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies.
1.
2.
3.
Provides examples of each of these criteria.
1.
2.
3.

Exam Preparation

Multiple-Choice Questions (5 marks)

Choose the response that is correct or that **best answers** the question.

1. Which of the following is not used to assess claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies?
 - a. Ethics.
 - b. Commercial gain.
 - c. Sensory properties.
 - d. Effectiveness of the product.

2. In 2014, The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) stated in an article that,

"At the beginning of every year, the ACCC receives an increase in contacts from the public about weight loss scams. The most common things being complained about are people engaging in a free trial of a weight loss product then incurring extra charges and being signed up to hidden subscriptions," Dr. Schaper said.

Source: <https://www.accc.gov.au/media-release/watch-out-for-weight-loss-scams>

This is an example of:

- a. Sources.
- b. Commercial gain.
- c. Ethics.
- d. Effectiveness of the product.

3. Doctor X prescribed a nutrient supplement to help patients control their weight. Patients lost significant weight but regained it after they stopped taking the supplement.

Which of the following should the Doctor and patient have investigated before taking the supplement?

- a. Commercial Gain.
- b. Ethics.
- c. The effectiveness of the product.
- d. Context.

4. Consumers should be wary of weight-loss and nutritional companies because:
 - a. The company may include additional charges and subscription conditions in the terms and conditions.
 - b. The claims made by the company may not be evidence-based and customers may not benefit from the product and waste their money.
 - c. Their advertisements may contain images of slim women and muscly men who say they have used the product when they haven't.
 - d. All of the above.
5. Which of the following is likely to be considered ethical?
 - a. Some weight loss and nutritional supplement companies use persuasive language to get people to buy their products.
 - b. Some weight loss and nutritional supplement companies pay people to give testimonials.
 - c. Some weight loss and nutritional supplement companies offer support groups to their clients.
 - d. Some weight loss and nutritional supplement companies involve people purchasing products that cost a lot of money.

Short Answer Questions (10 marks)**Question 1 (8 marks)**

Advertisements like the one below can be found on social media and the internet.



a. Use the criteria below to assess the claims made in this advertisement. (2 marks)

Criterion	Assessment of the claims made in this advertisement.
Ethics	

b. Identify two other criteria that can be used to assess claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies and provide examples of what consumers should look for when assessing these criteria. (6 marks)

Criterion	Examples

Question 2

Explain why it is important for consumers to assess claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies. (2 marks)

Exam Preparation

Multiple-Choice Questions (5 marks)

Choose the response that is correct or that **best answers** the question.

1. Which of the following is not used to assess claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies?
 - a. Ethics.
 - b. Commercial gain.
 - c. **Sensory properties.**
 - d. Effectiveness of the product.

The answer is not A, B or C. These are the criteria used to assess claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies.

The answer is C. Sensory properties are used to assess the sensory properties of a dish.

2. In 2014, The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) stated in an article that,

"At the beginning of every year, the ACCC receives an increase in contacts from the public about weight loss scams. The most common things being complained about are people engaging in a free trial of a weight loss product then incurring extra charges and being signed up to hidden subscriptions," Dr. Schaper said.

Source: <https://www.accc.gov.au/media-release/watch-out-for-weight-loss-scams>

This is an example of:

- a. Sources.
- b. **Commercial gain.**
- c. Ethics.
- d. Effectiveness of the product.

The answer is not A. This passage does not relate to the sources of information.

The answer is B. This passage relates to weight-loss companies deceiving consumers and benefitting financially.

The answer is not C. The passage describes an unethical situation; however, it directly relates to commercial gain.

The answer is not D. The passage does not relate to the product's effectiveness.

3. Doctor X prescribed a nutrient supplement to help patients control their weight. Patients lost significant weight but regained it after they stopped taking the supplement.

Which of the following should the Doctor and patient have investigated before taking the supplement?

- a. Commercial Gain.
- b. Ethics.
- c. **The effectiveness of the product.**
- d. Context.

The answer is not A. There is no mention of the weight-loss company benefitting financially.

The answer is not B. The passage does not relate to ethics.

The answer is C. The Doctor should have determined the product's effectiveness by determining if the scientific evidence was evidence-based.

The answer is not D. Context is used when assessing the validity of food information.

4. Consumers should be wary of weight-loss and nutritional companies because:

- The company may include additional charges and subscription conditions in the terms and conditions.
- The claims made by the company may not be evidence-based and customers may not benefit from the product and waste their money.
- Their advertisements may contain images of slim women and muscly men who say they have used the product when they haven't.
- All of the above.

The answer is D. All of these factors can be used by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies to convince customers to buy their products and benefit financially.

5. Which of the following is likely to be considered ethical?

- Some weight loss and nutritional supplement companies use persuasive language to get people to buy their products.
- Some weight loss and nutritional supplement companies pay people to give testimonials.
- Some weight loss and nutritional supplement companies offer support groups to their clients.
- Some weight loss and nutritional supplement companies involve people purchasing products that cost a lot of money.

The answer is C. This is the best answer. Providing support while on a weight-loss program or taking supplements can be beneficial. However, consumers need to be aware of the additional costs of these support programs.

The answer is not A, B and D. These responses would be considered unfair and deceiving.

Short Answer Questions (10 marks)

Question 1 (8 marks)

Advertisements like the one below can be found on social media and the internet.



a. Use the criteria below to assess the claims made in this advertisement. (2 marks)

Criterion	Assessment of the claims made in this advertisement.
Ethics	<p>The student must refer to the advertisement in their assessment.</p> <p>Any of the following answers were accepted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The image in the top left corner shows a very skinny and muscly woman. This implies that the consumer will look like this woman by drinking these shakes. This is unethical because drinking a shake cannot make someone look muscly or thin. • The wording 'Complete Sports Nutrition' implies that the product provides all of a person's nutritional needs. There is no supporting evidence of this in the advertisement. Therefore, it might not provide all the nutritional needs different people have. • The advertisement states that consumers need to replace their meals with shakes. This restricts a consumer in what they eat and does not enable them to eat whole foods and learn to prepare nutritious meals. This may be considered unethical. • The reference to countless celebrities taking the product is unethical because it does not list the celebrities and is not endorsed by a celebrity. This may be made up. • The statement 'buy now' encourages a sense of urgency with consumers. The language is emotive and persuasive. Therefore it may be considered unethical.

b. Identify two other criteria that can be used to assess claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies and provide examples of what consumers should look for when assessing these criteria. (6 marks)

Criterion	Examples
For one mark, the student needed to identify a criterion. Commercial Gain	<p>For two marks, the student needed to provide two examples.</p> <p>Any of the following examples were accepted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies might offer low 'start-up' price that gradually increases to a much higher amount over time. • Some companies offer consumers a money-back guarantee when they sign up for their program or product. If the service fails, many consumers

	<p>will be unlikely to complete the required paperwork or pay the postage to return the product.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some companies will even include the guarantee details in the fine print, which makes ceasing a service or returning an opened product difficult. Upon signing up for the free product, the company requests their personal and credit card details but allows minimal time for the customer to cancel the future transaction before charging their credit card. Some weight-loss companies make a lot of money from selling additional food products associated with their brand. Some companies make automated payments from a credit card or bank account that is difficult or time-consuming to cancel.
<p>For one mark, the student needed to identify a criterion.</p> <p>Effectiveness of the product</p>	<p>For two marks, the student needed to provide two examples.</p> <p>Any of the following examples were accepted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumers should thoroughly investigate whether weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies are effective and do what they are saying they do. Consumers should check whether the weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies meet Australian safety standards. This way, the Australian government has approved them to be safe. Consumers should be wary of weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies that promote their products as methods of rapid weight loss. Rapid weight loss can be hard to maintain and ineffective because consumers don't learn to change personal habits and when they often return to their original weight when they stop using the product.

Question 2

Explain why it is important for consumers to assess claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies. (2 marks)

For two marks, the student needed to provide one reason consumers need to assess claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies.

Any of the following examples were accepted:

- Some claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies may not be evidence-based and, therefore, not supported by scientific evidence. This means that consumers could waste their money buying a product because it may not work.
- Some claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies may mislead consumers. It may say it causes weight loss when it doesn't. This means that consumers could waste their money buying a product because it may not work.
- Some claims made by weight-loss and nutrient supplement companies may be unrealistic for the everyday person. They may involve consuming only what the company provides, which might not fit with a person's lifestyle and it may be expensive. This may result in a high likelihood of the diet failing.