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# Dieters to get billions

BY JIM RITTER  
HEALTH REPORTER

## Fen-phen users offered settlement

The maker of heart-damaging fen-phen diet drugs has offered \$3.75 billion to settle thousands of lawsuits, and now plaintiffs such as Roxann Rymek must decide whether to accept the deal.

Rymek, who lives in Orland Hills, said she

may need surgery to repair heart valves she believes were damaged by the drug combination.

American Home Products made fenfluramine, the "fen" in fen-phen, and called the

drug Pondimin. It also made a chemical cousin, Redux. In 1997, the company withdrew the drugs after a Mayo Clinic study linked them to potentially fatal heart-valve damage.

Pending a judge's approval, the settlement includes payments of as much as \$1.5 million for each consumer harmed. Payments will vary according to the person's age, how long the drugs were taken and seriousness of the damage.

For patients who have not been harmed, American Home will pay for medical

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# Fen-phen users get offer

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monitoring, including a doctor's visit and echocardiogram. The settlement excludes claims of primary pulmonary hypertension, a rare but serious lung disorder. Those cases will be litigated separately.

About 6 million people took fen-phen, and about 4,100 suits have been filed. The settlement is open to anyone who used Pondimin or Redux, whether or not they filed suit. It "provides fair and equitable terms for both diet drug claimants and American Home Products," said company chairman John Stafford.

American Home contends the drugs were safe for most users.

The 16-year agreement allows plaintiffs to drop out and pursue individual lawsuits. But American Home said the deal is off if too many people drop out.

Chicago lawyer Kenneth Moll, who represents 2,000 fen-phen users, estimated that between 10 percent and 25

percent of his clients will opt out. "Their diseases will warrant more than \$1.5 million," he said.

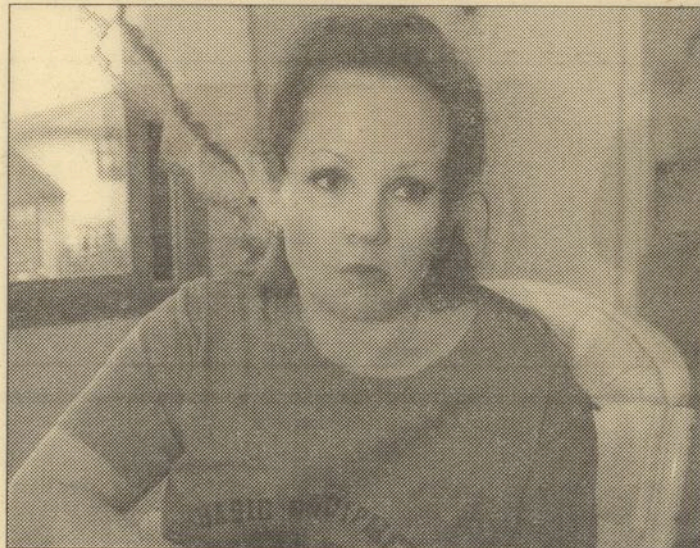
Rymek, 37, hasn't decided whether to accept the deal. She started taking fen-phen in 1996, and along with diet and exercise, lost 52 pounds. She stopped taking fen-phen after experiencing chest pain, breathlessness and dizziness. And she has regained 18 pounds, in part because she can't exercise. Rymek said she tires easily and is in bed by 8:30 p.m. "I used to be so active," she said.

The agreement is a good deal for anyone who doesn't have a serious illness because it includes medical monitoring, said Michael Moirano, lead attorney in a class action lawsuit of Illinois plaintiffs. "It gives everybody a chance to find out if they have the problem or not," he said.

American Home's stock rose \$3.12½, or 7 percent, to \$48.25.

For more information, call (800) 386-2070.

Contributing: Associated Press



JON SALL / SUN-TIMES

Roxann Rymek, 37, of Orland Hills, started taking fen-phen in 1996. She stopped taking the diet drug after experiencing chest pain, breathlessness and dizziness.