

# **Weight Loss Medicines**

## **Do weight loss medicines really work?**

Weight loss medicines, when combined with a reduced-calorie diet, can help obese people lose weight. People who use these drugs may not feel as hungry or they may feel full after eating only a small amount of food.

Some weight loss medicines include diethylpropion (brand name: Tenuate), mazindol (brand names: Mazanor, Sanorex), phentermine (brand names: Fastin, Ionamin), phendimetrazine, (brand names: Bontril, Plegine), benzphetamine (brand name: Didrex), and sibutramine (brand name: Meridia). A new kind of weight loss medicine, called Orlistat (brand name: Xenical), keeps your body from digesting some of the fat that you eat. Some are available without a prescription, such as phenylpropanolamine (brand names: Acutrim, Dexatrim).

## **Are weight loss medicines used for people who are just a little overweight?**

No. Weight loss medicines are only for people who are very obese--people who weigh 20% or more above what is ideal for their height and body type or who have a high body mass index (BMI). The BMI is a measure of your weight and height. Your doctor can tell you if weight loss medicines might be helpful in your case.

## **How can I avoid gaining weight back when I stop using the medicine?**

You must change the kinds of food you eat and you must exercise. There is no magic cure for being overweight. Weight loss medicines can help you lose weight. But to keep the weight off, you must eat a healthy low-calorie diet and exercise regularly. Remember that losing weight and keeping it off is a lifelong effort.

Weight loss medicines can help you get off to a good start, but once you stop taking them, the weight you lost may come back. You must continue to eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly after you stop taking the medicine.

## **Are there any side effects from using weight loss medicines?**

Yes. Some of the medicines may cause nervousness, irritability, headaches, dry mouth, nausea and constipation. Others may cause depression, drowsiness, abdominal pain, diarrhea, dry mouth, headaches and sleep problems (including very intense dreams). Orlistat may cause gas, frequent or uncontrollable bowel movements, diarrhea and oily stools.

Sometimes these drugs can increase blood pressure and cause an irregular heart beat. Rarely, some of these drugs can have serious side effects. Your family doctor can tell you more about these side effects, and will help you decide if you want to take a weight loss medicine.

## **How can I lose weight without using a weight loss medicine?**

First, you must change your eating habits. Don't expect to change everything overnight. Start by training yourself to eat without doing anything else at the same time. For example, don't eat while you watch TV. Focus on what you're eating. Try to eat slowly.

Next, change what and how much you eat. Eat 3 to 4 small, low-fat, low-calorie meals a day. Include a grain (rice, bread, crackers), 1 or 2 fruits or vegetables and a low-fat protein (egg whites, tuna packed in water, skinless chicken breast, skim milk, fat-free yogurt). Eating high-fiber foods may help make you feel full without adding a lot of calories. Eating smaller meals more often (every 3 to 4 hours) may also help you not feel hungry. Drink plenty of water each day (8 glasses). Avoid eating high-fat foods. Foods that are high in fat include pastries, donuts, cakes, cookies, potato chips, cheese, nuts, cooking oils, butter, cream, margarine, shortening, hot dogs, some cuts of meat and fried foods.

### **What about exercise?**

You must exercise for at least 30 minutes, 4 to 6 times a week. Regular exercise helps you burn calories faster, even when you are sitting still. It does this by raising your metabolism (the rate at which you burn calories). Exercise also helps you burn fat and build muscle. Aerobic exercise raises your heart rate and helps you burn calories. The longer you exercise, the more your body will burn fat. Working out for 30 minutes or more at a time will help you get the most benefit from aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercises include swimming, brisk walking, jogging and bicycling. Weight training, or anaerobic exercise, is also good because it adds muscle mass to your body. Muscles burn calories faster than fat.

Be sure to check with your family doctor before you begin an exercise program. He or she can help you plan a healthy diet and an exercise schedule that will help you meet your weight-loss goals.

(Created 9/00)  
(Updated 2/00)