

- Rx Focus - Weight Loss—Diets, Drugs and Supplements
- January Health Observances
- New Drug Approvals



Rx Focus

Weight Loss—Diets, Drugs and Supplements

As most people are aware, the percentage of overweight and obese individuals in the United States is on the rise. Thirty four percent (34%) of American adults are overweight and an additional 31% can be classified as obese. At CBCA Rx, we use Body Mass Index (BMI) to help us differentiate between the classifications of overweight and obese. The BMI is a measure of weight for height. Overweight individuals have BMI's ranging from 25.0 to 29.9, and obese individuals have BMI's of 30.0 and above. (For more information on BMI, visit www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi.)

Obesity can contribute to an increased risk of diabetes, certain cancers, cardiovascular disease and a reduced life expectancy. With the start of the New Year, many have made New Year's resolutions to lose weight. Following is a summary of the different diets, prescription drugs and supplements that can help individuals fulfill their goals for the New Year.

Low Carbohydrate Diets

Low carbohydrate diets are currently in vogue. Both the Atkins diet (www.atkinscenter.com) and the South Beach diet (www.southbeachdiet.com) fall into this category. Individuals on the Atkins diet can eat unlimited amounts of meat, fish, eggs, and some cheeses. Sweets and starchy snacks are forbidden, and the diet also excludes many fruits, starchy vegetables and grains. The theory behind this diet is that by limiting carbohydrates, your insulin levels decrease, and consequently, the metabolic changes that can cause weight gain are reduced. The Atkins diet causes

rapid, short-term weight loss mainly by water loss and restriction of caloric intake. At present, there are no long-term studies that assess this diet's risks or its effect on weight maintenance.

With the South Beach diet, carbohydrates are classified as good or bad based on their "glycemic index," that is, the effects of different carbohydrates on blood glucose. Animal studies demonstrate that high glycemic index foods can lead to fat accumulation and reduce the body's capacity to break down fats. Low glycemic index foods may help weight loss by causing a feeling of fullness and possibly delaying hunger. At present, there is no credible clinical research demonstrating the efficacy of this diet. In addition, there is no evidence that cravings for sugars and starches are reduced.

Low Fat Diets

Low fat diets, such as the Ornish diet (www.ornish.com) and the Pritikin diet (www.pritikin.com) have become less popular of late. They are difficult to maintain. Also, it is recognized that some fats, mono and polyunsaturated fats, are beneficial to overall health. On the up side, low fat diets allow plenty of fruits and vegetables (limited or excluded in the low carb diets). Weight loss occurs mainly by restriction of calories.

Balanced Diets

Balanced diets, such as The Zone Diet (www.zoneperfect.com) and Weight Watchers (www.weightwatchers.com) promote a much more balanced selection of the various food groups than the low carb or low fat diets. With the Zone Diet, the diet consists of 40% carbohydrates, 30% proteins and 30% fats. This ratio purportedly maintains insulin levels within a range that minimizes fat storage and inflammation. Although there is no scientific evidence to support its theory, advocates of the Zone diet believe that eating this combination of foods leads to weight loss, decreased hunger, increased energy and enhanced immunity. Following this diet is difficult, and its complexity makes long-term maintenance of weight loss questionable.

Weight Watchers is the largest commercial weight loss service provider in the United States. It promotes weight loss and maintenance through a lower calorie, nutritionally balanced diet, an exercise plan and group support meetings. It has been shown that Weight Watchers seems to be better than self-help for affecting weight loss and weight maintenance out to a 2-year time point.

January Health Observances

Cervical Health Awareness Month

www.cervicalcancercampaign.org or call (732) 255-1132

Glaucoma Awareness Month

www.aaao.org or call (415) 561-8525

National Thyroid Awareness Month

www.aace.com or call (212) 453-2492

Dietary Supplements

Dietary supplements for weight loss include starch blockers, fat blockers and ephedra. Starch blockers are made from an extract of white kidney beans and are thought to prevent the digestion of starches in the intestine. However, there is no credible clinical research to support this claim. Fat blockers include ingredients such as chitosan, psyllium and glucomannan. Like Xenical®, these products are thought to decrease the absorption of fat from the intestine; however, there is little scientific evidence to support these claims.

Ephedra is marketed as a fat burner. Although it may cause weight loss, it is considered *unsafe* for use due to its risk of serious or life-threatening adverse effects including stroke and heart attack. The FDA is in the process of banning sales of ephedra. Other herbs containing ephedrine-like stimulants that should be avoided include bitter orange, country mallow, heart leaf and ma huang.

Prescription Weight Loss Medications

Weight loss medications should be used only by those individuals who are at increased medical risk due to their obesity. They should not be used for "cosmetic" weight loss. The majority of weight-loss medications are non-amphetamine appetite suppressants. They promote weight loss by either producing a feeling of fullness or decreasing appetite. Examples include Adipex-P®, Fastin®, Ionamin®, Tenuate®, and Meridia®. Xenical® (orlistat), approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1999, acts by decreasing intestinal fat absorption by about 33%. (Note that amphetamines are not recommended for use in the treatment of obesity due to their abuse and dependence potential.)

In general, the FDA has approved weight-loss medications for short-term use, that is, a few weeks or months. There are, however, two exceptions – Xenical® and Meridia® (sibutramine). These two medications have been approved for longer term use in significantly obese patients. AT CBCA Rx, many of our plans require prior authorization for the use of Xenical®, and the medication is approved for 3 months at a time.

On average, an individual can expect a modest weight loss of anywhere from 5 to 22 pounds while taking weight-loss medications with maximum weight loss occurring at around 6 months.

In order to lose and maintain weight successfully over the long term, the use of weight-loss medications to treat obesity needs to be combined with improved diet and increased physical activity.

In the end, obtaining and maintaining a healthful weight is an on-going process that can only be accomplished by tolerable life-style changes.

References:

1. Pharmacist's Letter, Detail-Document #200110, by Gayle Nicholas Scott, Pharm.D., January 2004
2. "Prescription Medications for the Treatment of Obesity", National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), updated June 2003 <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/pubs/presmeds.htm>



New Drug Approvals

Lexiva 700mg Capsule

Approved 10/21/03

Chemical Name: fosamprenavir

Manufacturer: GlaxoSmithKline

Therapeutic Class: Protease Inhibitor

Approved Indication: Treatment of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in combination with other antiretroviral agents.

Other Medications in Class: Agenerase, Crixivan, Kaletra, Norvir, Fortovase, Viracept

Average Wholesale Price: \$10.00 per capsule

Raptiva Injection

Approved 10/27/03

Chemical Name: efalizumab

Manufacturer: Genentech, Inc. and Xoma Ltd.

Therapeutic Class: Immunosuppressive Recombinant Humanized IgG Monoclonal Antibody

Approved Indication: Treatment of chronic plaque psoriasis in patients 18 years and older who are candidates for systemic therapy or phototherapy.

Average Wholesale Price: \$ 343.00 per unit

Special Notes: Raptiva is given as a subcutaneous (SC) injection. It is recommended that the injections be given under a physician's supervision. Although patients can be trained on proper self-administration techniques, CBCA Rx will exclude coverage of this medication on all of its plans unless the client directs us otherwise.

Symbyax 6mg/25mg, 6mg/50mg, 12mg/25mg and 12mg/50mg Capsules

Approved 12/29/03

Chemical Name: olanzapine and fluoxetine HCl combo

Manufacturer: Eli Lilly & Co., Inc.

Therapeutic Class: Antidepressant

Approved Indication: Treatment of depression in adults with bipolar illness.

Average Wholesale Price: \$ 8.20 and \$12.47 per unit for 6mg and 12mg olanzapine content capsules, respectively.

Special Notes: Not covered for any clients excluding antidepressants from their plans.



675 Foxon Road, Suite 204
East Haven CT 06513
Phone: (800) 936-1193
Fax: (203) 468-8416

©2004 CBCA Inc.