

# Obesity: the impact of weight-loss drugs on society

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Obesity is the condition in which there is so much body fat to the extent that it reduces life expectancy and has a negative impact on health. According to the World Health Organization,(WHO) obese people have a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or higher.

However, obese Asians develop more negative health effects than obese Caucasians so various Asian countries have redefined obesity. Obese people are at greater risk from Type 2 diabetes (insulin, a chemical made in the pancreas and which regulates glucose, is rejected by the cells), heart disease, and hyperlipidemia (a high concentration of fat in the bloodstream). Obesity is often caused by a high calorie diet, a sedentary lifestyle (a lifestyle with little to no physical activity), and combination of genetics (some genes controlling appetite and metabolism will be inclined to obesity when there is enough food provided). There are various treatments for obesity, anti-obesity (diet) pills being one of them. Anti-obesity pills work mainly in three different ways.

Some of them suppress appetite by blocking cell membrane receptors which control food and tobacco intake. Others block fat breakdown and stop nutrients being absorbed by restraining lipase (an enzyme in the pancreas which breaks down fats into glycerol, fatty acids and alcohol). Yet others speed up metabolism, the chemical processes in the body by injecting a stimulant which accelerates it. Currently, only one type of drug is authorized by the United States Food and Drug Administration for continuous use. Orlistat, also known as Xenical is a pill which prevents the absorption of fats from the diet, effectively lowering the intake of calories.

Sibutramine, a drug which suppresses the appetite by controlling the re-uptake of the molecules in the neurotransmitters in the brain.

Neurotransmitters are chemical substances released from the nerve endings when a nerve impulse arrives. Sibutramine blocks serotonin, a neurotransmitter responsible for appetite amongst other things. It also blocks norepinephrine (also known as noradrenaline), a stress hormone.

Some say that the disadvantages of anti-obesity pills outweigh the advantages. In today's fast-paced society, anti-obesity pills are an easy and painless way to lose weight since exercise or any other kind of physical activity is not required in order to enjoy its benefits.

These pills are comparatively more wallet-friendly as opposed to a treadmill and various other weight-loss surgeries. Taking anti-obesity pills require no planning and can be easily incorporated into a busy schedule. In short, anti-obesity pills are best suited for people with tight schedules. However, as mentioned above, there are various disadvantages, some life threatening. Orlistat causes frequent bowel movements and oily feces (also known as steatorrhea.

This condition is due to the fact that the fats that are not absorbed reach the large intestines and end up in the feces). According to the manufacturer of Orlistat, GlaxoSmithKline, these symptoms can be regulated by avoiding foods with high amounts of fat. Studies have shown that long term consumption of Orlistat will increase the taker's chance of contracting breast cancer. Sibutramine, a pill which has been taken off US market, will increase blood pressure and cause a dry mouth, an increased appetite and dysgeusia (a distortion in the taste buds which will then cause a strange taste in the

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mouth). Anti-obesity pills are only prescribed for cases of extreme obesity, cases in which the excess weight is life threatening. In other words, when the “ benefits of the treatment outweigh the risks” (Wikipedia).

This means that anti-obesity pills should only be prescribed when there is really no other option. The Royal College of Physicians only recommends anti-obesity medication for people with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 27 or above, and only so if they have pre-existing medical conditions (such as type 2 diabetes and/or high cholesterol). The net is further tightened by the fact that the person must have failed to lose five percent or less of their body weight in a month. The person must have made earnest attempts to lose weight before they can even be considered for a prescription. Anti-obesity pills are considered by many to be a last ditch attempt at losing weight. Americans spend \$40 billion per year on various weight-loss accessories and programs.

If there are 70 million obese adult Americans, that means that each person spends approximately \$600 on these treatments and pills. A prescription of Xenical costs about \$154 and only come in batches of 30 120mg pills. Xenical should be taken three times per day, in accordance with meals. If an obese person eats three square meals every day for a month, their monthly expenditure for 90 diet pills would cost \$462, a sizable chunk of the average single American’s household income (\$46, 326). This is important since the American economy is in a bad condition right now and compounded with the recent job layoffs and inflation, being able to afford anti-obesity medications is tricky.

Health insurance does not cover anti-obesity medications. The importance of appearance is also affecting how obese people view themselves. There are many preset stereotypical attitudes that obese people face. In today's society, obese people are viewed as unattractive and are under pressure to slim down. Women are particularly under pressure as society requires them to be slim.

A Yale College study shows obese people are discriminated in their daily lives. Weightism, (weight-based discrimination) ranks third behind ageism (age-based discrimination) and racism (race-based discrimination). People act like this because their preconceived notions of obese people make them treat them so. Insecure obese people may resort to quick weight-loss treatments, in this case, diet pills. This is dangerous since obsessive consumption of diet pills will cause long term side effects.

As a final decision, I think that anti-obesity pills are simply a convenient way of losing weight. However, this treatment is not without risks and some people simply choose to overlook the fact that the side effects are long lasting. I do not think this is an effective way to treat obesity since there are dangerous side effects and may not always work. Anti-obesity pills should be treated with care and should be only taken as a last resort.