

If you have any questions, ask your physician.

Medications for Managing Your Weight

Weight loss medications can be helpful tools to use with lifestyle treatments (like diet, exercise, healthy sleep and behavior change) to manage weight in some adults. This applies to adults with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 kg/m² or more or a BMI of 27 kg/m² or more with at least 1 weight-related medical condition.

The goal of using medication to lose weight is to improve your health and wellbeing — not just to change the numbers on a scale. Studies have shown the average weight loss is 8% to 15% of body weight for people who use weight loss medication in addition to lifestyle treatments versus 3% who use lifestyle changes alone. However, each person's results will be different. Some people can have dramatic, lasting weight loss with lifestyle changes, while other people will have little or no weight loss with medications. In general, the combination of using weight loss lifestyle and medication together can be helpful.

In some people, metabolic (bariatric) surgery may be an option. Medications also have a role in patients who have had bariatric surgery, are preparing for weight loss surgery or have regained weight.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved many medications for lasting weight management. You can learn more about them in this handout.

Choosing a medication

All the medications in this handout (except orlistat) work by controlling your appetite. They can reduce your hunger and increase the feeling of fullness. This can help you lose weight when you also follow a reduced-calorie meal plan. There are currently no FDA approved medications (nor supplements) to safely raise metabolism or “burn off” calories.

The medication that is right for you will depend on your medical history and the possible interactions it may have with other medications you are taking.

You will also need to think about the cost and your insurance coverage for the medication. This includes whether an employer has opted in to cover weight management medication, co-pays, deductibles and direct patient costs. Also check insurance coverage for the brand name medication. Some of the brand name medications have manufacturer support programs such as co-pay discounts, direct mail order at a discounted price, and education and support programs. You can find these on the manufacturer's website. Third party companies such as GoodRx® may have generic medication at a lower price than what you would pay with insurance.

As you think about whether a weight loss medication might be right for you, keep in mind that it is simply one of the tools that can lead to better health and weight loss. Please note, you cannot take any of the medications if you are pregnant. All women of child-bearing age must use some form of birth control.

Your physician will help you decide if taking a medication to manage your weight is right for you.

Weight loss medications

Qsymia® (phentermine/topiramate)

Qsymia is a combination of phentermine and topiramate, in an extended-release formula. Phentermine is a medication with stimulant properties. It stimulates the brain and decreases your appetite. Topiramate can treat seizures and migraine headaches. Together these medications can control your appetite and decrease your thoughts about food.

Dosage: Take 1 tablet once a day. (It comes in 4 different doses.)

Possible side effects: Common side effects include dry mouth, constipation, headache, sleep problems, tingling of the hands and feet, dizziness, and sense of taste changes. Serious side effects include birth defects, increased heart rate, suicidal thoughts or actions, and increased eye pressure that could lead to permanent vision loss if not treated. A rise in blood pressure is unusual.

Do not take Qsymia if you have glaucoma (an eye disease), untreated hyperthyroidism (a thyroid disease), heart disease, or uncontrolled hypertension (high blood pressure).

Topiramate can cause birth defects. Do not take this medication if you are pregnant. Women who might become pregnant while taking Qsymia should:

- Get a pregnancy test before taking Qsymia
- Use birth control
- Get monthly pregnancy tests while taking Qsymia

Stop taking Qsymia 1 week before surgery. In rare cases, Qsymia may cause a drop in blood pressure when used with anesthesia medications.

If you do not have health insurance, you may be able to get this medication at a reduced price from a mail-order pharmacy.

To learn more, go to qsymia.com.

Contrave® (naltrexone/bupropion)

Contrave is a combination of naltrexone and bupropion, in an extended-release formula. Naltrexone can treat alcohol and opioid dependence. Bupropion is approved to treat depression, seasonal affective disorder and to help people stop smoking. Contrave helps to control your hunger.

Dosage: Take 2 tablets 2 times a day. You must slowly increase the medication dose over the 1st month to reach the full dose of 2 tablets 2 times a day.

Possible side effects: Common side effects include nausea, constipation, headache, vomiting, dizziness, sleep problems, dry mouth and diarrhea. Serious side effects include worsening depression, suicidal thoughts, neuropsychiatric disorders, and seizures. Bupropion and Contrave have been linked to an increase in blood pressure in some people.

If you do not have health insurance, you may be able to get this medication at a reduced price from a mail-order pharmacy.

To learn more, go to **contrave.com**.

Saxenda® (liraglutide)

Saxenda is a higher dose of the type 2 diabetes medication Victoza®. It acts like a hormone your intestines normally release into the blood stream within minutes of eating food. Like the hormone, Saxenda sends signals to your brain to reduce your appetite.

Dosage: Give yourself an injection (shot) once a day. You will start with 0.6 milligrams (mg). You must slowly increase the medication dose over the first 4 weeks to reach the full dose of 3 mg a day.

Possible side effects: Common side effects include nausea, diarrhea, vomiting and constipation. Saxenda may also cause hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) if you take it with some other diabetes medications like sulfonylureas and insulin. Saxenda also has warnings for inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis), gallbladder problems (including gallstones) and increased heart rate. Serious side effects are rare.

People who have the following should not use Saxenda:

- Severe allergic reactions to liraglutide
- Personal or family history of medullary thyroid cancer
- Personal or family history or a rare condition called multiple endocrine neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2)

To learn more about the medication, cost savings and support, go to **saxenda.com**.

Wegovy® (semaglutide)

Wegovy is a higher dose of the type 2 diabetes medication Ozempic®. It acts like a hormone your intestines release into the blood stream within minutes of eating food. Like the hormone, Wegovy sends signals to your brain to reduce your appetite.

Dosage: Give yourself an injection (shot) 1 time each week. You must slowly increase the medication dose over the first 4 months to reach the full dose of 2.4 mg once a week.

Possible side effects: Common side effects include nausea, diarrhea, vomiting and constipation. Wegovy may also cause hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) if you take it with some other diabetes medications such as sulfonylureas and insulin. Wegovy also has warnings for inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis), gallbladder problems (including gallstones), increased heart rate, acute kidney injury (from dehydration) and diabetic retinopathy (damage to the eye's retina if you have diabetes).

People who have the following should not use Wegovy:

- Severe allergic reactions to semaglutide
- Personal or family history of medullary thyroid cancer
- Personal or family history or a rare condition called multiple endocrine neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2)

To learn more about the medication, cost savings and support, go to **wegovy.com**.

Phentermine

Phentermine is a medication with stimulant properties. It stimulates the brain and decreases your appetite. Many obesity medicine experts consider monitored, long term use of phentermine to be safe and effective. It works for many (but not all) people.

Dosage: Take 1 tablet once a day. The medication comes in several dosages (15 mg, 30 mg and 37.5 mg).

Possible side effects: Common side effects include dry mouth, constipation, sleep problems, and increased jitteriness or anxiety. Serious side effects include high blood pressure, heart palpitations, restlessness, dizziness and tremor. A rise in blood pressure is unusual. Blood pressure may fall with weight loss. In rare cases, some people have had chest pain from coronary artery spasm.

You should not take phentermine if you have a history of heart disease, stroke, congestive heart failure, uncontrolled high blood pressure, glaucoma, untreated hyperthyroidism, a history of drug abuse, or if you are pregnant or nursing.

Stop taking phentermine 1 week before surgery. In rare cases, phentermine may cause a drop in blood pressure when used with anesthesia medications.

Lomaira® (phentermine)

Lomaira is a medication with stimulant properties. It stimulates the brain and decreases your appetite.

Dosage: Take 1 tablet (8 mg) up to 3 times a day.

Possible side effects: Common side effects include dry mouth, constipation, sleep problems, and increased jitteriness or anxiety. Serious side effects include high blood pressure, heart palpitations, restlessness, dizziness and tremor.

You should not take phentermine if you have a history of heart disease, stroke, congestive heart failure, uncontrolled high blood pressure, glaucoma, untreated hyperthyroidism, a history of misusing drugs, or if you are pregnant or nursing.

To learn more, go to **lomaira.com**.

Xenical® (orlistat)

Xenical blocks your intestines from absorbing about 1/3 of the fat you eat from a meal. Orlistat also comes as an over-the-counter medication known as Alli®. Alli is half the dose of Xenical.

Dosage: Take 1 tablet 3 times a day with meals that have fat.

Possible side effects: Abdominal cramping, flatus (passing gas) with discharge, leaking oily stool, having more bowel movements and not being able to control bowel movements.

There is a risk of fat-soluble vitamin deficiency when taking Xenical. People taking this medication should take a multivitamin at least 2 hours before or after the medication.

Plenity®

The FDA approves Plenity as a device not a medication. The capsules have cellulose and citric acid. They expand in your stomach when you take them with water. This helps you feel full and less hungry.

Dosage: Take 3 capsules with 16 ounces of water 20 minutes before lunch and dinner.

Possible side effects: Abdominal bloating, cramping, irregular bowel movements, changes in frequency and consistency of bowel movements, and indigestion. You can get the capsules through the Plenity website.

To learn more, go to **myplenity.com**.

If you have any questions about managing your weight with medications, please ask your physician.