



# Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

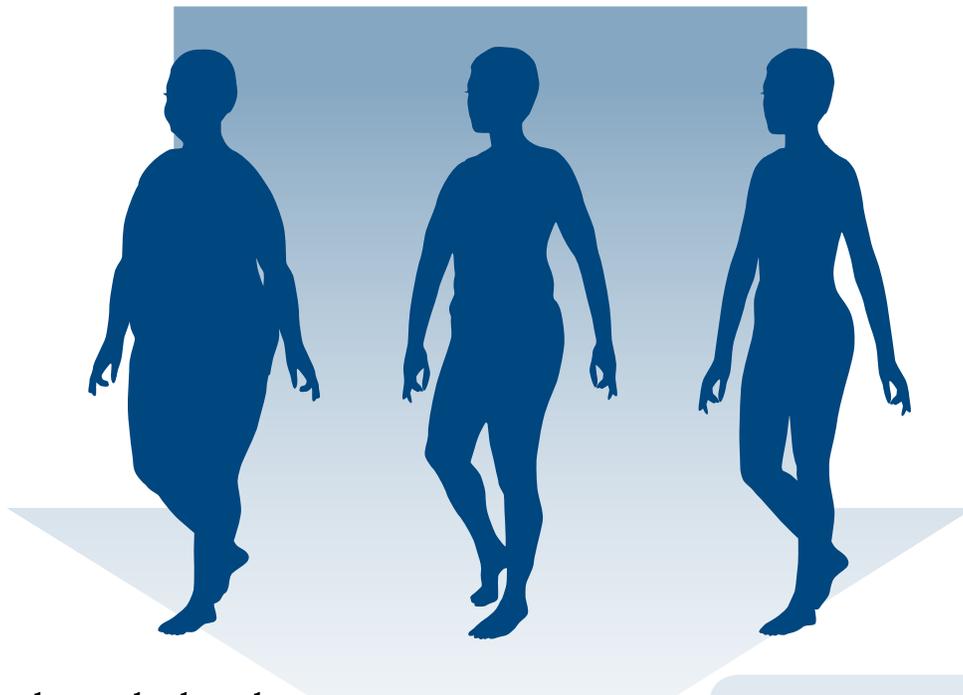
*The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12*



Volume 8, Issue 3

Fall 2010

## Weight Loss Supplements Will They Help Me Lose Weight?



If you walk through the pharmacy or grocery store, you will see a whole section of weight loss products. These products are also advertised in TV and internet commercials. The question is: “Will these really help me lose weight?”

Only two weight loss medicines are currently approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for long-term use. These are sibutramine (brand name Meridia®) and orlistat (brand names Xenical® and Alli®). However, at this time the FDA is looking into the safety of sibutramine (Meridia®), since it may increase the risk of heart attack or stroke.

### ***Also in this issue...***

<b>Is Your Medicine Making You Gain Weight? .....</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Health Literacy Month .....</b>	<b>Page 6</b>

*(continued on page 2)*

Both Meridia® and Xenical® are prescription medicines. Alli® is available without a prescription. These medicines may provide some weight loss, but are not a “quick fix.” People who used these medicines lost an average of about 6 to 12 pounds. For the best chance of success, you must also change your diet. Because all medicines have side effects and risks, they are preferred for patients with health risks due to weight. The risks and benefits of the medicine should be carefully considered.

Other weight loss products that you may see advertised are not FDA approved medicines. Although they look like medicine, these products are considered “dietary supplements.” Claims of weight loss are not usually backed by high quality studies and may be risky to use. Companies may use a “doctor” to support their claims, but this does not prove that a product works for weight loss.

There are two main problems with these supplements:

- 1) Unlike medicines, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not review their safety or how well they work before they are sold.
- 2) Their purity is not well-regulated.

When supplements say that they are for weight loss, they are usually required to include a disclaimer that states, “This statement has not been evaluated by the FDA. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.” This means that the supplement cannot claim to “treat” your weight.

In December 2008, the FDA discovered 25 different tainted weight loss supplements. These included PerfectSlim, Fatloss Slimming, and Extrim. These different supplements contained one or more of the following:

- ✓ Rimonabant – a drug that was recalled in Europe
- ✓ Phenytoin – a prescription drug for seizures
- ✓ Phenolphthalein – a dangerous laxative
- ✓ Other harmful products

The number of dangerous supplements has now grown to more than 70 products. The FDA can only take action after receiving reports of someone being harmed. Due to these concerns, it is better to avoid using weight loss supplements.

The safest and most reliable ways of losing weight are lifestyle changes in diet and exercise. MOVE!® (Managing Overweight and Obesity in Veterans Everywhere!) is a national weight management program designed to help Veterans lose weight, keep it off and improve their health. If you are interested in participating in MOVE!®, ask your primary care provider to enter a consult to your facility’s MOVE!® program.



[www.move.va.gov](http://www.move.va.gov)

# Internet Resources for Patients



http://www.

## **Overview of Dietary Supplements. U.S. Food and Drug Administration.**

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/ConsumerInformation/ucm110417.htm#what>.

## **Tips for the Savvy Supplement User: Making Informed Decisions and Evaluating Information. U.S. Food and Drug Administration.**

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/ConsumerInformation/ucm110567.htm>.

## **'Miracle' Health Claims: Add a Dose of Skepticism. Federal Trade Commission, produced in cooperation with the Food and Drug Administration.**

<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/health/hea07.shtm>.

### References:

Sibutramine (Meridia®) Prescribing Information. Abbott Laboratories: North Chicago, IL. January 2010.

Orlistat (Xenical®) Prescribing Information. Genentech: South San Francisco, CA. May 2010.

Overview of Dietary Supplements. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. [internet]. <http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/ConsumerInformation/ucm110417.htm#what>. Cited 7/14/10.

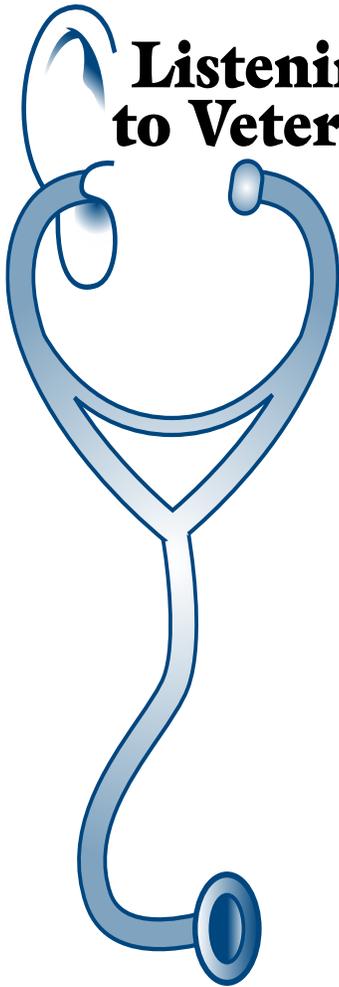
Claims That Can Be Made for Conventional Foods and Dietary Supplements. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. [internet]. <http://www.fda.gov/Food/LabelingNutrition/LabelClaims/ucm111447.htm>. Cited 7/14/10.

FDA Uncovers Additional Tainted Weight Loss Products; Agency Alerts Consumers to the Finding of New Undeclared Drug Ingredients. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. [internet]. <http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/2009/ucm149547.htm>. Cited 7/14/10.

---

### Written by:

Shehrbano Hasan, Pharm.D.  
Dayna Mitchell, Pharm.D., BCPS  
Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital



## **Is your medicine making you gain weight?**

Controlling your weight can be a major factor in the management of your overall health. Evidence shows that weight gain is a risk factor for high blood pressure, diabetes, gallbladder problems, heart disease, lung disorders, joint problems, and various cancers.

Controlling calories and exercise are the standard tools for weight management. In recent years, more attention has been given to the effect certain medicines may have on weight gain. Research has shown a connection between certain medicines and weight gain. However, there is no specific list of medicines that cause weight gain. In addition, each medicine can have a different effect on different patients.

Medicines suspected to have an impact on weight gain are:

- ◀ Antidepressants
- ◀ Antipsychotics
- ◀ Diabetes drugs
- ◀ Blood pressure medicines (some)
- ◀ Steroids (Prednisone, Dexamethasone)

Your medicines may have an impact on your weight and your weight may have an impact on the medicines you need. It is a complex relationship and can be difficult to understand.

---

Answered by:  
Rita Mingesz, MEd, RD, CD, CHES  
Marianne Miller, PharmD  
Milwaukee, WI VAMC

**So what to do? If you are concerned about your weight, you may need to make some lifestyle changes.**

1) Talk to your Primary Care Team.

- ◀ Take your medicines as directed, but be sure to share your concerns and ask questions.
- ◀ Meet with your Primary Care dietitian for a lifestyle assessment.
- ◀ Ask for information about how your medicine could affect your weight and how you can control it with diet, exercise or even a change in medicine.

2) Take control of your lifestyle.

- ◀ Look for ways to increase your activity. Be sure to talk to your health care provider first!
- ◀ Improve your diet with fruits, vegetables and portion control.
- ◀ Consider getting involved in the MOVE! (Managing Overweight and Obesity in Veterans Everywhere!) program. Ask your provider for more information or go to [www.move.va.gov](http://www.move.va.gov).

**It is far better to make lifestyle changes to prevent weight gain than try to lose weight. A healthy lifestyle is the cornerstone of your health care management.**

Source:

The American Journal of Psychiatry, 2001 March; 158(3):501-2.

This year, you only need **1** TAKE THE TIME. GET YOUR FLU SHOT One Gets It Done It protects against both seasonal and H1N1 flu. 2010-2011 Flu Season **FLU SHOT** Infection: Don't Pass It On [www.publichealth.va.gov/InfectionDontPassItOn](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/InfectionDontPassItOn)

## *October is* **Health Literacy Month**

Health care is complicated and the health care system can be confusing. That is why so many people have trouble understanding the information they receive from their health care providers.

Health literacy is the ability to understand health information and to use that information to make good decisions about your health and medical care. Problems with health literacy can affect people of all ages, races, incomes, and educational levels.

Health literacy is not just about how well you read or how much education you have had. It's about how well you understand health terms and issues. Even highly educated people can have trouble understanding health care information.

When you don't fully understand the information, you are more likely to have poor health. For example:

- ◆ You may have difficulty taking your medicine correctly, if you can't understand the written instructions.
- ◆ You may forget to schedule routine medical tests if you don't know why they are important.
- ◆ You may have trouble managing chronic diseases, such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

Doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and hospitals need to find ways to help patients better understand and use health information.



However, there are things you can do to improve your health literacy:

- ← Ask a lot of questions. Then be sure you understand the answers. If you don't understand, ask the doctor or nurse for more information. Asking questions may not always be easy, but it can get you the information you need to take better care of yourself.
- ← When your doctor or nurse gives you directions, repeat them back in your own words. This gives you a chance to clarify what you heard. Studies show that doctors and patients often have very different ideas of what the patient is going to do after leaving the doctor's office.
- ← Bring all your medicines to every appointment. Ask your doctor to go over all of your drugs and supplements, including vitamins and herbal medicines. Many adults don't really understand how to take their medicines.
- ← Have another adult with you when talking to your doctor. They can take notes and help you remember what was said.
- ← Tell your doctor if you need an interpreter. Even if you speak some English, tell the doctor's office what language you prefer when you make an appointment. You have a right to an interpreter, at no cost to you.

Celebrate Health Literacy Month by trying these suggestions. You might even improve your health – or the health of someone you care about.

**For more information:**

AHRQ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

<http://www.ahrq.gov/>

MedlinePlus

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthliteracy.html>

Veterans Affairs Health Care

<http://www1.va.gov/health/>

Source:

Improving Your Health Literacy. Navigating the Health Care System: Advice Columns from Dr. Carolyn Clancy, September 7, 2010. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. <http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/cc/cc090710.htm>. Accessed 9/15/2010

---

Submitted by:  
Jill Zahn, MLS  
Milwaukee, WI VAMC

**Great Lakes VA  
Healthviews Editorial  
Committee:**

Jill Zahn  
Senior Editor  
Milwaukee VAMC

Kathleen Ford  
Hines VAH

Jeanne Chouinard  
Iron Mountain VAMC

Constance Cornett  
Jesse Brown VAMC

Gail Meissen  
Madison VAMC

Alfreda Rhodes-King  
North Chicago VAMC

Kathy Johnson  
Tomah VAMC

Kim Chapman  
Layout and Design  
Milwaukee VAMC

**Important note: We are not able to mail this newsletter to you. It can be found in waiting rooms of your VA Medical Center and outpatient clinics.**

You can also subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter by going to the VISN 12 webpage [www.visn12.va.gov](http://www.visn12.va.gov) Click on the Newsletters link on the left side of the page.



*Your best source for information about your health will always be your health care team. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to ask questions about your health concerns.*

**Phone Numbers for VISN 12 Hospitals**

Hines:	708-202-8387
Iron Mountain:	906-774-3300
Jesse Brown:	312-569-8387
Madison:	608-256-1901
Milwaukee:	1-888-469-6614
North Chicago:	1-800-393-0865
Tomah:	1-800-872-8662

***"Ask An Expert" Question  
or Idea for Future Articles***

Do you have an "Ask An Expert" question or an idea for a future article? Your ideas can be e-mailed or mailed to the Senior Editor.

**E-mail address:**

SrEditorGreatLakesVAHealthviews@va.gov

**Mailing address:**

Jill Zahn  
Milwaukee VA Medical Center Library  
5000 W. National Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53295

VISN 12 VA Healthcare facilities are accredited by The Joint Commission. Joint Commission evaluates healthcare facilities on quality, safety of patient care and safety of the environment.

If you have any concerns about patient care or safety in your facility, first contact the person in charge. If your concern cannot be resolved, the VA encourages you to contact Joint Commission. You may request a "public information interview." Requests can be made to:

Division of Accreditation Operations  
Office of Quality Monitoring  
The Joint Commission  
One Renaissance Boulevard  
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181  
1-800-994-6610