



## Diet 'Alli'

# Fat-blocking product helps people shed excess weight

By: **LINDA WONDOLOSKI** (Tue, Jul/17/2007)

For dieters looking for a new option, the “weight” may be over.

Alli, which works by limiting fat absorption, became the only FDA-approved over-the-counter weight-loss product when it landed on store shelves in mid-June.

Each 60mg Alli pill contains half the dose of the prescription drug Orlistat, which earned FDA approval under the trade name Xenical in 1999.

The aim of Alli (pronounced Al-eye) is to provide a tool for helping overweight individuals shed more pounds — 50 percent more — than by dieting only, and to encourage dieters to follow a reduced-calorie, low-fat diet and to exercise. According to the product Web site (<http://www.myalli.com/>), which includes detailed information, including menu suggestions and support from a registered dietitian, pharmacist and fitness specialist, Alli users can expect a modest weight loss of 1 to 2 pounds per week.

Manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline, Alli received approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Feb. 7. The approval (which is based on clinical proof that products work) provides Alli with a different designation from other weight-loss products on the market, which are regulated as dietary supplements and do not require premarket approval from the FDA.

The FDA has restricted sales of Alli to adults 18 years and older. The agency’s recommendations include using the drug “only in conjunction with a weight-loss program that includes a reduced-calorie diet, a low-fat diet and an exercise program” as well as taking a multivitamin daily. Alli is taken three times a day, with meals.

Although she has not had experience with the newer Alli, Dr. Mary Campagnolo, a general practitioner at Lumberton Family Physicians and chief of the Family Medicine department at Virtua Memorial Hospital Burlington County in Mount Holly, said she has prescribed Orlistat in the form of Xenical "on occasion" to help provide dieters with incentive.

"I used it for some people who were starting to get motivated to see some weight loss," said the doctor.

She said patients "can lose weight within a few weeks of starting it." Campagnolo said the 5 to 10 pounds of weight that patients lost in the early stages of their diets served as evidence they were making progress and helped keep patients motivated to drop pounds.

One benefit of Xenical, Campagnolo said is that, "It is considered safe for most patients with other chronic diseases besides obesity. Basically it doesn't really have drug-to-drug interaction. It's safe for people with diabetes or hypertension."

Campagnolo said she recommends using the Xenical, which contains 120 mg of Orlistat per dose, for no longer than six months.

"It's not meant to be a long-term drug," she said.

One of the problems with the prescription drug was that "many insurance companies would not pay for it," said Campagnolo, who estimated that Xenical costs more than \$100 per month.

A 60-count starter pack of Alli sells for \$49.99 at Target and Walgreens; and at Costco, a 150-capsule package sells for \$66.39, according to the companies' online sites.

The doctor said the active ingredient, Orlistat, "works as a fat blocker, the fats are not (all) absorbed by the body.

"It works in the colon, so it can lead to problems with diarrhea. It (fat) stays in the colon and is excreted," said Campagnolo. "That's really the main down side to it."

Campagnolo said she instructs patients using Orlistat to take it with a meal that has some fat in it so the pill can work.

However, she said, "Not more than 30 percent of calories from fat is recommended."

According to myalli.com, "The active ingredient in Alli attaches to some of the natural enzymes in the digestive system and prevents absorption of about one-quarter of the fat in the foods you eat. Undigested fat cannot be absorbed and

passes through the body naturally.”

The meals listed on myalli.com average 15 grams of fat. Alli users who take the product with meals that exceed the recommended fat levels, says the manufacturer, may experience “treatment effects” in the form of “gas with oily spotting, loose stools, and more frequent stools that may be hard to control” as the undigested fat exits the body.

The company suggests that new Alli users “wear dark pants, and bring a change of clothes with you to work” until they figure out how the product works for them.

Alli purchasers are invited to register online via a 16-digit code found inside packages. Dieters can record their eating and exercise habits and track their progress on a personal myalliplan home page.

According to FDA online data, obesity has been increasing since the late 1980s and about 64 percent of Americans are overweight and 30 percent are obese.

“The weight-control business is growing and so is the diabetes crisis,” said Charlotte Genetta, a staff dietitian at Virtua who has counseled diabetics and also works as a consultant for an independent research group.

“Americans are well known for wanting a quick fix,” said Genetta, noting that she had clients who continued using Ephedra even after serious health problems were linked to the dietary supplement, which was banned by the FDA in February 2004.

Genetta said weight-loss products such as Alli can be helpful.

“In the right context, with the proper support, it can be a wonderful thing,” Genetta said. “It gives them (dieters) the confidence to continue with major behavior changes.

“If they’re supported along the way, there’s a better likelihood that it will stick,” she said.

Genetta said the treatment effects of Alli remind her of the problems that some bariatric surgery patients experience when unpleasant side effects serve as reminders to reduce food intake.

“As a diet, I would hope people would use it to support positive changes in their behavior,” she said.

Genetta said the body needs some fat in order to absorb fat-soluble vitamins.

“If this was taken on a long-term basis, you could have a problem with vitamin absorption,” she said.

Campagnolo said individuals considering a diet should first make sure a medical

problem, such as hypothyroidism, has not caused their weight gain.

"You should always be sure you rule out other problems that may be causing obesity," said Campagnolo.

In addition, Alli's makers warn that individuals who have had organ transplants or who have been diagnosed with food absorption problems should not use the product.

Brian Jones, vice president of communications for consumer health at GlaxoSmithKline, said sales of Alli are "ahead of expectations but it's still too early to tell."

Pharmacists, he said, have been "generally supportive of another safe pill that can help people lose weight — in a sea of untested, unproven products.

"Generally, we've had a good response."

Dr. Marcin Krotkiewski, a professor in medicine at Sweden's Sahlgrenska Academy who worked on clinical trials for Xenical, has developed a weight-loss supplement made from herbal compounds which also inhibits fat absorption.

Although CUUR is less effective than the prescription-strength product — 60 percent compared to Xenical's 80 percent — it has none of the gastrointestinal side effects, said Krotkiewski, whose career has focused on weight management.

Krotkiewski said CUUR works by impairing fat absorption and increasing the metabolic rate, which helps prevent dieters from regaining the weight they lose. He said the combination offers the key to solving that problem.

"Weight regain and weight maintenance are the biggest problems," he said. "Obesity is like the weather. Everybody is talking about it and nobody can do anything with it."

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