Review: orlistat and sibutramine are modestly effective for weight loss at 1 year


Clinical impact ratings GP/FP/Primary care ****** IM/Ambulatory care ****** Endocrine *******

**What is the effectiveness of anti-obesity medications in trials with ≥1 year follow up?**

**METHODS**

**Data sources:** Medline (1966 to December 2002), EMBASE/Excerpta Medica (1980 to December 2002), Cochrane Controlled Trials Register (Issue 3, 2002), Current Controlled Trials metaRegister of Controlled trials (December 2002), bibliographies of relevant studies, and experts and manufacturers.

**Study selection and assessment:** randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of approved anti-obesity agents for weight loss or weight maintenance in adults with body mass index (BMI) >30 kg/m² or >27 kg/m² plus ≥1 obesity related comorbid condition (eg, coronary artery disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, heart failure, dyslipidaemia, hypertension, reproductive or gastrointestinal cancer, gallstones, fatty liver disease, osteoarthritis, and sleep apnoea), had blinding of patients and healthcare providers, included a placebo group or another anti-obesity drug group, used an intention to treat analysis, and had ≥1 year of follow up. Studies of off-label therapy, drugs with high addiction potential that preclude long term use, or investigational, herbal, or alternative compounds were excluded. Study quality was assessed.

**Outcome:** weight loss at 1 year.

**MAIN RESULTS**

Only trials of orlistat and sibutramine met the selection criteria. 16 RCTs (11 of orlistat and 5 of sibutramine) were included. 14 RCTs (11 of orlistat and 3 of sibutramine) were weight loss trials in which drug therapy was used in conjunction with a weight loss diet for 1 year. 2 RCTs of sibutramine were weight maintenance trials with 12 to 18 month follow up. 11 weight loss trials (n = 6021, mean age 49 y, 71% women, mean BMI 35.7 kg/m²) used standard doses of orlistat (120 mg, 3 times/d). 3 weight loss trials (n = 929, mean age 47 y, 80% women, mean BMI 33.4 kg/m²) used sibutramine, 10 to 20 mg/day. Patients who received orlistat had a 2.7 kg (95% CI 2.3 to 3.1 kg; 11 RCTs) greater weight loss (33.4 kg/m²) than those who received placebo. Results from these 2 trials were not pooled, but both showed greater weight loss in participants who received sibutramine than did those who received placebo.

**CONCLUSION**

Orlistat and sibutramine are modestly effective for weight loss at 1 year.

Abstract and commentary also appear in ACP Journal Club.

**Commentary—continued from previous page**

Although orlistat and sibutramine undoubtedly produce weight loss, the effect is modest and is less than can be achieved with intensive lifestyle interventions. Combining increased physical activity and calorie restriction has been shown to reduce the risk of incident diabetes by as much as 58% in 2 similar studies. Lifestyle interventions have been poorly studied but are the preferred treatment option for most individuals, although many persons who are overweight or obese are unable to undertake or adhere to intensive lifestyle interventions, especially over the longer term. Until effective methods of obesity prevention are introduced, a role for pharmacological treatment of obesity remains. Further research is required to establish cost effectiveness and to identify subgroups of patients who are most likely to benefit from different approaches to weight loss.

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**Orlistat (Orl) or sibutramine (Sib) v placebo for weight loss at 1 year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Number of trials</th>
<th>Weighted event rates</th>
<th>RBI (95% CI)</th>
<th>NNT (CI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5% weight loss</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>256% (132 to 446)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% weight loss</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>93% (66 to 125)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Abbreviations defined in glossary; weighted event rates, RBI, NNT, and CI calculated from data in article using a random effects model.