

Orlistat (Xenical)

Orlistat is used together with a reduced-calorie diet to help you lose weight and to help keep the lost weight from returning. It is also used in overweight people who may also have diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or heart disease.

Orlistat works by keeping your intestines from absorbing some of the fats from the food that you eat. The undigested fat goes out of your body in your bowel movements. It is available over-the-counter and through prescription.

How To Take It

The usual dose is 120 milligrams (mg) three times a day with meals containing fat.

Orlistat prevents the absorption of some of the fat you eat. You should take it with liquids during the meal or up to 1 hour after eating. If you occasionally miss a meal or eat a meal that contains no fat, you should skip the dose of orlistat.

Because orlistat may decrease the amount of some vitamins that your body absorbs from food, you will need to take a multivitamin supplement once a day. Take the vitamin supplement at least 2 hours before or after taking orlistat. You may also take your multivitamin supplement at bedtime.

When using orlistat, your diet should contain no more than 30% of calories as fat. More fat in your diet will increase the side effects of this medicine. Your diet should be nutritionally balanced, and your daily intake of fat, carbohydrates, and protein should be distributed over three main meals.

If you miss a dose of this medicine, skip the missed dose and go back to your regular dosing schedule. Do not double doses.

Warnings

If you have diabetes and lose weight on orlistat, your doctor may need to adjust your diabetic medications. Orlistat has not been well-studied in children or in adults over age 65. It should not be used during pregnancy (can cause fetal malformations), but poses no risk to future children if taken when not pregnant. Its effects on breastfeeding have not been studied and may impose unknown risks to the infant. Orlistat may cause problems if you have a malabsorption syndrome (problems with absorbing or digesting food).

Side Effects

The most common side effect is gas and leaky or oily bowel movements. Orlistat can increase the risk of kidney stones and gallstones.

Interactions

If you are taking levothyroxine (synthroid) or cyclosporine, do not take them within 4 hours of taking orlistat (or they won't be absorbed). Orlistat may interact with: Linoleic Acid, Warfarin. There may be other drug interactions; check with your pharmacist and let your doctors know you are taking orlistat.

—Adapted from May Clinic Website, Updated 7/27/2012 by Chris Aiken, MD