



Xenical (Orlistat)

How It Works

Orlistat (Xenical) works locally in the intestines when taken 3 times a day with meals by preventing your intestines from absorbing some of the fat from the food you eat. This fat passes through your intestines and is excreted in your stool. When you absorb less fat, you take in fewer calories, which causes weight loss. Orlistat does not affect your appetite as medications that work in the brain do, such as *Meridia*.

Why It Is Used

Orlistat is prescribed to help people who are obese (those with a body mass index [BMI] of 30 or higher) lose weight. It may also be prescribed for people with a BMI of 27 or higher when they have other health conditions (such as diabetes or sleep apnea) that are made worse by being overweight. **Check your BMI.**

Orlistat is not a miracle pill, and is designed to be used along with a reduced fat and calorie diet (no more than 30% of its calories from fat). A regular exercise program is also a vital part of any weight-loss treatment plan.

How Well It Works

Most people lose weight when they take Orlistat AND follow a reasonable low fat diet.

- People who follow a reduced-calorie diet and take Orlistat for 6 to 12 months lose about 17 to 22 pounds.^{1, 2, 3} People who follow the same diet but do not take Orlistat lose about 11 to 13 pounds.
- About 40% of people who take Orlistat and follow a low-calorie diet lose more than 10% of their body weight, compared with about 20% of people who use diet only.^{1, 3, 4}
- After 2 years of taking Orlistat, about 57% of people maintain a weight loss of at least 5% of their original body weight, compared with 37% of people who follow the same diet but do not take orlistat.³ Also, 34% maintain a weight loss of at least 10% of their original body weight, compared with 17% of people who follow the same diet but do not take orlistat.¹

Side Effects

Due to its mechanism of action, the side effects of Orlistat are all related to your intestinal tract (intestines or bowels). Only very small amounts of Orlistat are absorbed into the bloodstream, so it has little effect on other body systems.

Changes you may notice in your bowel habits include:

- Gas with bowel movements.
- Oily or fatty stool. The oil seen in a bowel movement may be clear, orange, or brown.
- Oily spotting between bowel movements.
- An increased number of bowel movements.
- An urgent need to go to the bathroom.
- Inability to control bowel movements.

Some people have these side effects only in the first few weeks of use. Most people have fewer side effects after 1 year of use. Others have them as long as they use Orlistat. The side effects increase when you eat more fat and decrease when you eat less fat. People using Orlistat are therefore advised to maintain a diet with less than 30% fat. This amount of fat keeps the side effects in a range that most people can manage.

Most people find these side effects unacceptable if they do not go away in a few weeks. Not being able to tolerate these side effects is the most common reason people stop using it.

Other Issues to Think About

- Orlistat interferes with your body's absorption of some fat-soluble vitamins. When you use Orlistat, you should take a daily multivitamin supplement that contains vitamins A, D, E, and K and beta-carotene. Take the multivitamin once a day at least 2 hours before or after taking Orlistat, such as at bedtime.
- Because Orlistat blocks fat absorption, there is concern that some people may take it to allow themselves to eat more fat without weight gain. However, the unpleasant side effects of Orlistat increase with the amount of fat a person eats. Early research shows that people taking Orlistat may want to eat less fat than before to lessen the unpleasant side effects. As long as you do not replace the fat calories in your diet with calories from other foods, Orlistat will work as intended.
- Consider using a support program that helps you with lifestyle changes along with this medication. The manufacturer of Orlistat provides a free support program (XeniCare) with your prescription. This program helps

you customize your weight-loss plan so that it fits your life. The program mails you personalized information (for example: recipes, exercise suggestions, and help with reading labels) and provides access to a support phone line staffed by nurses.

- Treatment with Orlistat may lower the level of total cholesterol and triglycerides (fats) in the blood. In this way it may lower your risk of heart disease. It may also have a positive effect on levels of blood sugar and insulin, which may lower your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.