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IN BRIEF

Orlistat OTC for Weight Loss

The FDA has approved over-the-counter (OTC) sale of the weight-loss drug orlistat (*Xenical* – Roche)¹ as *alli* (GlaxoSmithKline), to be used in combination with a reduced-calorie, low-fat diet. Orlistat binds to gastric and pancreatic lipases, preventing absorption of about 30% of dietary fat with the 120-mg prescription dose, and 25% with the 60-mg OTC dose. A 16-week controlled trial of the OTC dose (60 mg 3 times daily with meals) in overweight, not obese, patients (average BMI 26.8) on a reduced-calorie, low-fat diet found that patients taking the drug lost 1.15 kg more than those taking placebo.²

Orlistat causes flatulence with oily spotting, loose stools, fecal urgency and occasional incontinence in 20-40% of patients on a low-fat diet; these effects presumably would be more frequent and more severe with a higher fat intake or self-prescription of higher-than-recommended doses. The drug also interferes with absorption of fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, K); the manufacturer recommends that patients also take a multivitamin supplement at bedtime. Orlistat can increase the anticoagulant effect of warfarin and may interfere with the absorption of other drugs.

A “starter pack” of 90 capsules of *alli* (60 mg each) costs \$62.99, compared to \$224.64 for 90 capsules of *Xenical* (120 mg each).³

1. Orlistat for obesity. *Med Lett Drugs Ther* 1999; 41:55.
2. JW Anderson et al. Low-dose orlistat effects on body weight of mildly to moderately overweight individuals: a 16 week, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial. *Ann Pharmacother* 2006; 40:1717.
3. Cost based on information from drugstore.com (June 11, 2007).

Coming Soon in *The Medical Letter*:

Lisdexamfetamine dimesylate (*Vyvanse*) for ADHD
Arformoterol (*Brovana*) for COPD
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