New study on gaining weight after taking Orlistat: Age or obesity issues?

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An obesity drug is failing patients due to lack of education about side-effects, says a new study, "Gaining weight after taking Orlistat: A qualitative study of patients at 18-months follow-up," published online May 8, 2014 in the Journal of Health Psychology, found that patients who gained weight 18 months after taking Orlistat attributed their weight-loss failure either to the side effects which have prevented them from sticking to the medication or felt that the medication simply had not worked.

Studies show weight discrimination actually discourages people from doing activities that would lead to weight loss and healthier life. And in another new study by different researchers, (not related to Orlistat or any other weight management pills), age and weight discrimination in relation to health and loneliness are examined and discussed.

The team from the University of Surrey also found that participants described a series of barriers to weight loss including psychological and physical health issues, relationships and the make-up of their bodies. They also described a number of alternative methods of weight loss that had also failed, and the failure of Orlistat was included within this idea of permanent and ongoing failure.

Orlistat is currently the only prescribed drug for obesity and functions by reducing the amount of fat absorbed from food eaten

"Our results have significant implications for GPs and how they should communicate with the patients about this drug," said lead author Dr Amelia Hollywood, according to the May 8, 2014 news release, "Obesity drug failing patients due to lack of education about side-effects." Dr. Amelia Hollywood is from the University of Surrey. "GPs can improve patient support while taking Orlistat. At present, the so called 'side effects' of Orlistat are seen as unpleasant and intrusive. If health professionals can highlight that such 'side effects' are actually the consequences of eating high-fat foods while taking the drug, it could help ensure a change in diets. In addition, by alerting patients to these consequences and emphasizing the need for dietary change, patients may be in a better position to make an informed judgment as to whether they wish to be prescribed this medication. GPs may likewise be able to make a more informed decision as to whether the medication should be prescribed, which could have cost implications for the NHS by reducing the waste of medications."
Orlistat is currently the only prescribed form of pharmacological management for obesity and functions by reducing the amount of fat absorbed from food eaten, explained the study's abstract. Although frequently prescribed, there is marked variability in outcomes.

In the research, a total of 10 participants’ experiences of gaining weight after taking orlistat were analyzed using thematic analysis. Participants attributed their failed weight loss to mechanisms of the medication, emphasized a medical model of obesity with barriers to their weight loss and other weight-loss methods which had also failed. Overall, their weight gain was considered an inevitable part of their self-identity, reflecting their self-fulfilling prophecy of being a perpetual dieter, noted the study’s abstract. Authors of the study are Amelia Hollywood and Jane Ogden.

Weight and age discrimination

Perceived age and weight discrimination, more than perceived race and sex discrimination, are linked to worse health in older adults, according to another new research study from the Florida State University College of Medicine. The findings are part of a study, "Perceived Discrimination and Physical, Cognitive, and Emotional Health in Older Adulthood," measuring changes in health over a four-year period and recently published in the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry.

“Our previous research showed that perceived discrimination based on body weight was associated with risk of obesity. We wanted to see whether this association extended to other health indicators and types of discrimination,” said lead author Angelina Sutin, according to a May 7, 2014 news release, "Perceived age and weight discrimination worse for health than perceived racism and sexism." Sutin is an assistant professor of behavioral sciences and social medicine. “What we found was unexpected and striking.”

Sutin and colleagues found that older adults who perceived weight discrimination and older adults who perceived discrimination based on age, a physical disability or other aspect of appearance had significantly lower physical and emotional health and greater declines in health compared to people who did not report experiencing such discrimination.

In contrast, perceived discrimination based on relatively fixed characteristics — race, sex, ancestry and sexual orientation — were largely unrelated to declines in physical and emotional health for the older adults. The findings are based on a sample of more than 6,000 adults who participated in the Health and Retirement Study, a study of Americans ages 50 and older and their spouses. Participants reported on their physical, emotional and cognitive health in 2006 and 2010 and also reported on their perceived experiences with discrimination.

“We know how harmful discrimination based race and sex can be, so we were surprised that perceived discrimination based on more malleable characteristics like age and weight had a more pervasive effect on health than discrimination based on these more fixed characteristics,” Sutin said, according to the news release.
The one exception was loneliness

Loneliness was the most widespread health consequence of discrimination among older adults. Discrimination based on every characteristic assessed in Sutin’s study was associated with greater feelings of loneliness. According to previous studies, the effects of chronic loneliness are severe: increased risk for unhealthy behaviors, sleep disturbances, cardiovascular risk factors and suicide.

“Humans have a strong need to belong, and people often feel distressed when they do not have their desired social relationships,” Sutin said, according to the news release. “Our research suggests that perceiving a hostile society is associated with pervasive feelings of loneliness. An individual may interpret discrimination as an indication that they do not fit in the society in which they live.” Co-authors of the paper are Yannick Stephan of the University of Montpellier in France; and Henry Carretta and Antonio Terracciano, both of the FSU College of Medicine.

The detrimental effect of discrimination on physical and emotional health is not limited to young adulthood but continues to contribute to health and well-being in old age, the study's abstract noted. These effects were driven primarily by discrimination based on personal characteristics that change over time, for example, age and weight, rather than discrimination based on more stable characteristics such as race and gender.