

Not Your Mother's Weight-Loss Drug

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Not long ago weight loss medications were frowned upon by physicians and patients alike. Sure, the medications could help you drop pounds, but then you faced a host of significant side effects—not to mention the cost. Without insurance, the out-of-pocket cost prohibited most people from even considering it. For these and other reasons, many doctors, including myself have been slow to recommend weight loss drugs.

But there are some new kids on the block for weight loss medications—and it's worth taking a closer look.

The new generation of drugs involve a weekly shot. They help you lose weight by mimicking a hormone that reduces appetite and helps the body with how it breaks down sugar and fat. These medications were originally designed for diabetes management, but we are seeing benefits for weight loss overall. So far I've had a couple dozen patients try them, we've seen weight loss results from 35 pounds to up to 125 pounds in a six month period. The side effects aren't too bad. There can be some G.I. effects, but as long as you can tolerate a lower dose, they're very manageable.

The out-of-pocket cost is still quite high. However, that is starting to change as well. We're seeing more insurance plans approving weight loss medications based on body mass index and if you have any co-morbidities that can be attributed to your weight.

Now, my patients would be the first to tell you I'm not an advocate of a "quick fix" that ignores the need for good nutrition and exercise. But in 10 years of practice I've met enough people and heard enough stories to know there are obese people who are being mindful of nutrition and are faithfully exercising, and they feel stuck, frustrated and depressed. I hate to see those kind of people give up on healthy lifestyle habits because of number on a scale. It's these people who may want to take a look at the new weight loss drugs. They do not replace the need for taking good care of yourself. But for some, it could be a good option to "reset" your body. And then, of course, carry on with the healthy habits everyone needs to work on regardless of weight—eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep.

Healthnetwork Foundation connects business leaders to the world's best health specialists and creates customized medical philanthropy opportunities. For more information, contact Healthnetwork President, Megan Frankel at mfrankel@healthnetworkfoundation.org