

2009 The Year of the Diet Pill

It looks like 2009 is going to be the year of the [diet pill](#). Not only is the UK's rising obesity epidemic reaching critical mass and garnering much hand-wringing from media pundits, but there are two new diet pills arriving on the market that are creating a lot of excitement. It seems likely that we will see many more people trying slimming medication, not only due to a renewed interest in the potential of diet drugs but also because we are going to see many more people suffering from dangerous levels of obesity. The first of the diet pills that is garnering interest is GlaxoSmithKline's Alli. For many years, the drug manufacturers have been trying to get the European Medicine's Agency to grant them a license to sell the drug over-the-counter. This has been the case in the US since 2007, where it is widely sold and wildly popular. Finally, drug regulators have caved in and Alli, a half-dose version of the prescription-only pill Xenical, will be hitting UK pharmacy shelves in the summer. There have been mixed reactions to this decision; some are saying that better access to a proven and successful medication may do a lot to cut obesity levels. Orlistat, the medical name for Alli and [Xenical](#), has undergone extensive clinical testing and it is believed that dieters taking Alli will lose typically 50% more weight than those relying on diet and exercise alone. However, Orlistat can have some unfortunate side effects when the proper medical advice is not followed, namely that when dieters don't stick to a low-fat diet they can experience flatulence and even uncontrollable bowel movements. Some are worried that without a prescription and a proper consultation with a doctor, patients will not use it properly or even take too many pills and therefore believe that Xenical, the stronger, prescription-only medicine currently allowed, is a better option. The second pill is named Appesat and is derived from a seaweed extract. It has been described as being the pill version of a gastric balloon, as it stretches the stomach wall and thus prompts the receptors that signal to the brain that the stomach is full to act. As it is a plant-based pill it is not classified as a pharmaceutical, but the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority has approved it as a medical device. It will be available for sale in late Spring. While there are many pills and potions that claim to help with weight-loss, generally they are unproved and risky; Appesat is slightly more promising because it has undergone clinical trials, though it is fairly difficult to discover exactly how many people took part in the trial. At the moment, there are only two medicines that are recognised widely by European doctors as being effective in promoting weight loss, the full-strength Xenical and Reductil. The two medicines work in very different ways; Xenical blocks the action of an enzyme that allows the body to absorb dietary fat, thus limiting the amount of dietary fat that passes into the bloodstream, while Reductil reduces appetite. They are both prescription-only as they are not suitable for everyone and it is necessary to review a patient's lifestyle and medical history to know whether they are appropriate. Both are available for prescription on the NHS, though recently a leading expert in obesity, Dr. Nick Finer, suggested that GPs were reluctant to prescribe medication for weight-loss and needed to be encouraged to be more pro-active about offering weight-loss treatment. Certainly, with one in three adults expected to be obese by 2012, more needs to be done to encourage patients to take action over their weight. Our increasingly sedentary lifestyles are frequently, and probably rightly, blamed for the nations' weight problems. They also make diet pills a very attractive solution for many; who needs to go to the gym when you can pop a pill? This presents two issues which must be addressed: firstly, something must be done to prevent consumers being ripped off by the multi-million pound diet industry, which all too frequently sells untested, ineffective and even dangerous herbal pills and slimming aids to trusting and desperate customers. The second challenge will lie in encouraging those whose weight puts them at risk and who could benefit from slimming pills, whether over the counter or on prescription, to consider trying them, while ensuring that they are not seen as a quick fix but one part of a strategy to combat obesity.

About the Author

Sara Symcox is a well-known pharmacist based in UK. For more information related to [slimming pills](#), [Reductil](#), Xenical, diet pills and he recommends you visit [www.theonlineclinic.co.uk/ diet pills Xenical](http://www.theonlineclinic.co.uk/diet-pills-Xenical)

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