

# Keeping trim

With “losing weight” being one of the most popular New Year resolutions, **Victoria Goldman** investigates how pharmacies can help customers to achieve this goal – and stick to it

**A**ccording to the latest NHS statistics on obesity, 26 per cent of men and women were classified as obese in 2010, with a further 42 per cent of men and 32 per cent of women classified as overweight.

Losing weight isn't easy, however, and surgery is often seen as a simple solution. NHS statistics show that there were more than 8,000 hospital procedures for weight-loss stomach surgery in 2010-11, a 12 per cent increase from the previous year and a 30-fold rise in the last decade. According to a review by the National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcome and Death in October 2012, many people are opting for obesity surgery without proper consideration of the risks, with almost a fifth of patients having to be readmitted to hospital because of complications.

“The major issues at the moment appear to be that of gastric surgery and the messages that surround it,” says Ajit Mahli, head of pharmacy affairs for Celesio Group (UK). “It

is a subject that we all need to be aware of since patients are bound to ask further questions. The key is to advise the patient as to what options best suit them and mutually agree some goals that both parties can work towards.”

Customers should avoid so-called fad diets and diets that are particularly restrictive, as these approaches are likely to cause binge eating and eventual weight gain. You need to find slimming regimes that suit your customers in the long-term rather than provide a quick fix. So what can you offer customers this New Year in terms of weight loss support?

## Weight management services

Many pharmacies offer weight loss advice as part of a medicines use review or as a stand-alone weight management service. Ajit Mahli says that since weight management is a sensitive area for many people, it should be approached with care. “My advice would be to start by talking in terms of general health improvements,” he says. “Offer blood pressure screening and cholesterol checks and engage the patient with advice on living a healthy lifestyle in the first instance. It is certainly not a subject that can be handled with offers of miracle cures and overnight success.”

Pharmacy-led weight management services can be particularly beneficial for customers who have a lot of weight to lose and need ongoing support. According to Helen Bond, British Dietetics Association spokesperson, customers need to learn to decrease their portion sizes of healthy foods and increase their exercise levels. “With today's fast paced society, many people want to see extreme weight loss results within the shortest amount of time,” she says. “But it's probably taken years to accumulate the extra weight – so taking a year or so to lose the weight is completely reasonable. Research shows that it's far healthier and safer to lose weight slowly and steadily – around 1 to 2lbs (0.5 to 1kg) each week.”

There is no set way to lose weight and each customer will respond to different approaches. “We are all very different and the way that we behave in relation to external and internal stimuli varies considerably, so what works for some people may not be right for others,” says Bridget Benelam, senior nutrition scientist at

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## Maintaining a healthy balance

Ideally, most people should be able to get all the essential vitamins, minerals and other nutrients they need by eating a healthy, balanced diet that includes five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. But it is possible that if customers are trying to lose weight, they may cut out essential food groups, and therefore nutrients, from their diet. You may wish to recommend a daily multivitamin and mineral supplement to fill in any gaps.

"People often think that they should avoid calcium as calcium-rich foods are seen as fattening," says Helen Bond. "However, there is evidence that calcium from dairy products can help with weight loss and people should aim for three portions of dairy foods a day. B vitamins can help to release energy from food, although there is no evidence that these will help people lose weight. A healthy, balanced diet should give customers all the nutrients they need."

the British Nutrition Foundation. "There are lots of different options to choose from in terms of making changes in our behaviour that could have a positive impact on our health."

## Meal replacement programmes

Meal replacement programmes are a popular choice for dieters. Some programmes offer total meal replacements, while others involve a combination approach, mixing meal replacement products with healthy meals. Research in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in September, 2012, found that commercial weight-loss programmes, especially the very low calorie diets (meal replacements providing 500 calories a day for six to 10 weeks), can be effective at helping people to slim down. "There is plenty of clinical research backing the role of meal replacements, which usually work by reducing calorie intake," says Helen Bond. "These can be used as a tool to kickstart healthy eating plans."

Meal replacements are convenient as they avoid the need for portion control and calorie counting. However, pharmacists need to educate customers about how to change their eating habits as well, so that they don't put the weight back on again afterwards. The Slim-Fast plan is backed up by online support teaching the principles of healthy eating and how to manage everyday food and drink.

Lipotrim, which started out in 1987 as a GP programme but was extended to pharmacies in 2000, involves using Lipotrim Total Food Replacement formulas in place of all regular meals alongside weekly visits to the pharmacy. "Lipotrim is aimed at the severely overweight

or obese," says Dr Stephen Kreitzman, the nutritionist who established the brand and is co-director of the company. "Pharmacists have to be trained and are backed up by our helpline. Maintaining the weight loss afterwards is very difficult and this is when most people need advice."

## Weight loss products

There are many weight loss products available and customers should buy products backed by clinical research, such as alli, XLS-Medical and Adios. "It is important that pharmacists look at the evidence behind each product and make sure that they won't interact with anything else the customer is taking," says Helen Bond.

Alli 60mg hard capsules, from GSK, are back on shelf after an absence and are being supported by an intensive marketing campaign to raise awareness and drive sales through pharmacy. Aimed at women aged 35-plus with a BMI of 28 or more, the brand's key message is "for every 2lb lost through healthy eating, alli can help you lose 1lb more".

"We are delighted that alli is back in time to help people achieve their weight loss goals at a time when health and fitness will be top of their minds," says alli brand manager Laura Street. "We will once again be hosting consumer information online to help people take responsibility for long-term changes and encourage a healthier lifestyle and sensible eating to achieve gradual weight loss."

## Product update

Obethin is a new weight management product for overweight adults. Said to help

with portion control, balanced eating habits and overcoming hunger pangs, Obethin contains natural polysaccharides that are not absorbed or digested by the body. "This polysaccharide combination absorbs large quantities of water and forms a natural viscous and stable gel, partially filling the stomach and helping to produce a full feeling," says AHA Medical Services. "When mixed with food, this gel mixture slows the digestion process, contributing to satisfaction during the meal and in the period afterwards." Obethin's active ingredients include: glucomannan, a water-soluble polysaccharide that is considered a dietary fibre; xanthan gum, which is commonly used as a food thickening agent; sodium alginate, an anionic polysaccharide; flax seed; and spirulina platensis, a microalgae that is said to decrease appetite.

**AHA MEDICAL SERVICES 0191 370 9199**



Continuous tracking of measurements such as heart rate, blood pressure, body mass index and calorie burn can help people to achieve their fitness and weight aims. Now, to enable customers to take these

measurements in the home, A&D

Instruments, in partnership with Microsoft HealthVault, has launched the "Wellness Connected" health and fitness monitoring system. Equipment includes a blood pressure monitor, weighing scale, activity monitor and thermometer. The devices are equipped with near field communication (NFC) data systems (the same technology found in contactless credit cards), allowing users to store daily readings and analyse trends with "no wires and no connection problems", says A&D. There is also an Android application that works with NFC-enabled smartphones. The company describes the Wellness Connected system as "essential kit for advanced fitness enthusiasts, yet easy enough even for those taking their first steps towards physical fitness to use".

**A&D MEDICAL 01235 550 420**



XLS-Medical Fat Binder is a naturally derived, clinically proven weight loss aid available through pharmacies nationwide. According to a double-blind, placebo controlled study published in the journal *Obesity*, XLS-Medical can help dieters lose up to three times more weight than dieting alone. The product works by binding to undigested fat and is "extremely well tolerated so is gentle on the digestive system", says manufacturer Omega Pharma.

The company adds that XLS-Medical also helps dieters to feel fuller for longer.

Recommended dosage is two tablets, three times a day after meals. A trial pack of 30 tablets is available for a recommended retail price of £14.99.

**ACTAVIS 0800 373 573**



According to a double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical study, published in the journal *Obesity*, the recently launched XLS-Medical Fat Binder helps dieters lose 3lbs for every 1lb they lose on their own. This patented natural fibre complex supplement comes with a free 12-week online weight loss programme ([www.123hellome.com](http://www.123hellome.com)) designed to help dieters manage their weight loss successfully without cutting out important food groups.

According to marketing manager for the brand Nicole Ehlen, pharmacists and pharmacy assistants play a very important role when it comes to weight management. "A lot of consumers are looking for professional advice about how to lose weight and which products could help them," she says. "Pharmacists should ensure customers understand that weight loss requires a long-term commitment and results won't be achieved overnight. Encourage people to set themselves realistic weight loss goals."

To achieve the maximum benefit from XLS-Medical Fat Binder, the product should be taken regularly: two tablets, three times a day after each meal with plenty of water. Additional support is also available on the brand's website ([www.xlsmedical.co.uk](http://www.xlsmedical.co.uk)), where customers can find healthy eating and exercise tips from the company's experts as well as a free online support programme to help dieters achieve their goals.

## Case study

The Buchanhaven Pharmacy in Peterhead, Scotland, set up its weight management programme around four years ago. According to pharmacist Samantha Melrose (pictured second from the right, with her team), the programme was introduced in response to customer demand. "We had always offered weight, height and BMI measurement, but just added more services to the bundle as they became available," she says. "We then heard about Lipotrim and investigated its potential in the pharmacy. Celebrity Slim was then launched by Numark and, along with the launch of all, this gave us a pretty comprehensive package. We also offer the Numark plan, which is similar to the Weight Watchers idea, where we offer lots of advice and a weekly weigh in."



With its wide range of products and services, the programme has something to offer every customer. "Some products come with their own restrictions for use, but I believe that we offer something to suit everyone wishing to lose some weight," says Samantha. "Some customers attend weekly, while some use the services on a more ad hoc basis, such as in preparation for a special event. We have had lots of really positive feedback. One of our Lipotrim customers brings the staff doughnuts every time she attends!"

All of the staff are fully trained in the services. "Many of our staff have used the products themselves and that helps the quality of the service we offer," says Samantha. "We have a great team here and they are all extremely encouraging and delighted to help. Some services involve our pharmacist more than others, but we offer a very joined up approach involving the best person in the team for that customer."

The programme is promoted regularly to attract new people to the pharmacy and remind regular customers that the weight management programme and other services are available. "We use our Facebook page every day to promote health and pharmacy news and messages," says Samantha. "We also have a new website and we use our windows to their best advantage. Of course, word of mouth is very important too. One happy customer will tell many more!"