Dear Alice,

I am looking for information on the weight-loss drug Meridia. I have trouble controlling cravings and heard this drug could help.

Answer

Dear Reader,

While popping a pill to curb cravings may seem like a wish fulfilled, taking a prescription weight-loss drug should be considered only when other strategies ? like maintaining a healthy diet, increased physical activity, and counseling ? have failed. Like any medicine, Meridia carries with it potential side effects and risks, which is why the decision to start taking it should be discussed with a health care provider. It is usually prescribed if a patient has a body mass index (BMI) greater than 30, or if she or he suffers from obesity-related medical problems like diabetes or high blood pressure.

Meridia, the brand name for sibutramine, is a prescription obesity drug that helps to control the appetite. Meridia works by inhibiting the reuptake of serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine, all of which are neurotransmitters responsible for creating feelings of satiety and decreased hunger. When their reuptake is inhibited, there are more of these neurotransmitters circulating in the system, which increases feelings of satiety and decreases the appetite. Because of this function, Meridia is part of a family of medicines called SSRIs or Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor. Other famous SSRI drugs are the anti-depressants Prozac and Paxil, but Meridia is the first in this family to be used specifically for weight loss.

For best results, Meridia should be used in conjunction with a healthy diet and plenty of physical activity. These three together can aid in weight-loss more quickly and efficiently than any one of them alone. However, without the supporting and continued practices of diet and exercise, most people will gain back whatever weight they lost soon after popping their last pill.

If you start taking Meridia, it's good to be aware of the side effects that may come with it, like dizziness, drowsiness, constipation, dry mouth, sleeplessness, and headache. More serious side effects include an increased heart rate and elevated blood pressure, which can pose a risk for those with a history of high blood pressure, heart disease, heartbeat irregularities, or stroke. Be sure to tell your health care provider if you notice these symptoms or any other allergic reactions like a skin rash or hives. There are also many conditions like anorexia,
bulimia, glaucoma, heart disease, high blood pressure, and osteoporosis that would render Meridia a risky road to weight-loss.

When considering taking Meridia or any other medicine to help lose weight, you might want to ask yourself a few questions. Do you eat well and get enough exercise? Are you within a healthy weight for your height and build or is it medically indicated for you to shed some pounds? Are there other ways you have tried to control your cravings that have worked? A visit with a health care provider will help you determine whether or not this medicine is right for you. Columbia students can make an appointment to see a physician by logging in to Open Communicator [2], or by calling x4-2284. Whether you decide to take Meridia or not, you may want to keep in mind that eating well, sleeping enough, exercising, having fun, and respecting yourself no matter what shape you're in, will pay off big in the long-run, both on and off the scale.

Alice!
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