

Exploring Weight-Loss Tools that Help Improve Quality of Life

By **Andrea Lukes, M.D., M.H.Sc., F.A.C.O.G.**

"How can I lose weight?" It's a common question among women and men.

While I was in academic medicine, I encouraged exercise and change in diet without offering much more. Now that I am in private practice, I have changed my approach and continue to learn more about management of obesity and just "losing a few pounds."

Certainly, exercise and good nutrition are indispensable to long-term success in losing weight. What you eat and drink makes a difference. I also believe that losing 3-5 pounds with assistance can help motivate individuals to make better choices in diet and increase exercise.

Phentermine and Weight Loss

So for the last five years, I have prescribed phentermine because of the positive impact it has had for many of my patients. Phentermine was first approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration as an appetite-suppressing drug in 1959.

At one point, it was combined with fenfluramine or dexfenfluramine and called "Fen-Phen." This was a lethal combination that led to 24 cases of heart valve disease, as well as cases of pulmonary hypertension and some deaths among Fen-Phen users.

Studies showed that 30 percent of the people taking fenfluramine or dexfenfluramine had abnormal valve findings. The finding led to the voluntary removal of fenfluramine (or dexfenfluramine) from the market. However, the FDA has never asked manufacturers to remove phentermine from the market.

Recent evidence has emerged that fenfluramine and its metabolites has activity at the 5HT_{2B} receptor; whereas, phentermine does not. This led researchers to determine that the increased risk of cardiac valvulopathy was not due to phentermine. (See the FDA website.)

After earning her bachelor's degree in religion from Duke University (1988), Dr. Andrea Lukes pursued a combined medical degree and master's degree in statistics from Duke (1994). Then, she completed her ob/gyn residency at the University of North Carolina (1998). During her 10 years on faculty at Duke University, she cofounded and served as the director of gynecology for the Women's Hemostasis and Thrombosis Clinic. She left her academic position (2007) to begin Carolina Women's Research and Wellness Center, and to become founder and chair of the Ob/Gyn Alliance. She and partner Amy Stanfield, M.D., F.A.C.O.G., head Women's Wellness Clinic, the private practice associated with Carolina Women's Research and Wellness Clinic. Women's Wellness Clinic welcomes referrals for management of heavy menstrual bleeding. Call (919) 251-9223 or visit www.cwrwc.com.



The new medication Qsymia, which combines phentermine with topiramate, has emerged as an important medication for treating obesity. I have written about this in a prior issue of *The Triangle Physician*. Having prescribed this medication over the past 10 months, I find it to be both effective and well tolerated.

A newer medication, Belviq is indicated for chronic weight management. It is used in combination with a reduced-calorie diet and exercise. Although my experience is more limited with Belviq compared to phentermine and Qsymia, I have begun to incorporate it into my approach to weight management.



New Non-Invasive CoolSculpting

CoolSculpting is a revolutionary non-surgical procedure using advanced cooling technology to eliminate fat in specific areas of the body.

The science involves cryolipolysis, which cools adipose tissue to induce lipolysis (breaking down fat cells) without damage to other tissues. The cooling causes fat cell apoptosis (death), which leads to

a release of cytokines and additional inflammatory mediators that over two to four months eliminate the affected fat cells. This ultimately reduces the thickness of the fat layer.

“We have seen very high patient satisfaction with CoolSculpting,” said Cynthia Diehl, M.D., who offers the procedure at Diehl Plastic Surgery. “In the appropriate patient, we can expect a 20-25 percent fat reduction to a specific problem

area. This nonsurgical technology is a huge step in body contouring.”

For more information about CoolSculpting, call (919) 381-5540 or visit www.diehlplastics.com or www.coolsculpting.com.

New weight-loss medications and procedures can be life changing. Supporting someone in this effort can make a huge difference.

Just recently I saw a woman for a return visit who is married and in her mid-40s. She had lost 21 pounds during the past six months with medical assistance. She was thrilled, felt more confident and had reduced her HgA1c. Before she left my office, she gave me a hug.

Although she wants to give me credit, I emphasized that she was the one who made the positive change in her life.