



Smarter Drugs

Imagine a pill that could deal with an eating disorder as easy as a pain reliever gets rid of a headache. It's a medical wish that is approaching reality. Historically, psychological therapies have been the most effective treatment for curing addictive eating habits and eating disorders but doctors are now utilizing new medications combined with proven counseling techniques. And they are realizing very promising results.

Appetite suppressing drugs, both prescription and over the counter, along with other "weight loss" medications have been around for decades. They were the drugs of choice for years—until research discovered that they not only replace one addiction with another, but make the problem worse because they nurture the new addiction and combat the vital counseling efforts.

Newer drugs initially prescribed for anxiety and depression have been found to possess wonderful "side effects," such as minimizing or suppressing cravings, including hunger. Some are used in conjunction with counseling to treat both anxiety and depression as well as the high incidence of associated unhealthy eating habits. Genetic engineers are also on the job, working on ways to make the body burn more calories while at rest.

Most recently, studies have shown promising results with drugs that block the receptors that recognize painkillers. Without the ability to feel pain relief and pleasure from drugs, your body no longer reacts to these types of drugs (there is no "high") and no longer supports the addiction. Research is finding that this type of pain-relief blocking medication can reduce the same high we get from some foods. The body is disconnected from the food-reward cycle and diminishes its drive for specific taste preferences, such as sweets. The overall result: we lose our cravings and eat less. We not only lose our cravings for sweets, but also pass on the combination of sweets with fats and many of the volatile Fat Cocktail food items! The best part is that these blocking drugs do not have any addictive qualities or the rebound cravings that the older appetite suppressants create when they are discontinued.

In a similar vein, substance abuse programs for alcoholism and other drug addictions, that traditionally concentrate on counseling and use some of these blocking medications, are making good nutrition and exercise a part of their rehabilitation process. Studies show that there are better outcomes in substance abuse programs when nutrition and exercise education are a part of the process. Removing food as a drug is a critical step for any change to a healthier lifestyle.