



I want the magic weight loss pill

by Michele Brannan, MPAS, PA-C
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With half a snicker but half a hope that it may actually exist, at least once a month or so a patient will come to me asking for a magic pill to lose weight. Americans, who are among the heaviest in the world, are inundated with magazine articles on how to help one lose the weight and quickly.

Someone needs only to check out at the grocery store to find at least a handful of magazines on weight loss and firming up the abs and butt. Of course, half a foot away are the seemingly obligatory impulse buys of chocolate bars and candy.

It doesn't make anyone feel better when our doctors pester us to no end on getting the weight off and the models and actors on TV are a size two (or have a sculpted six-pack).

So what do we do? Crash diets of course! I will admit they are often effective in getting the weight off.

Effective, but not healthy and certainly do not help maintain the lower weight.

Let's review obesity and the term 'overweight' first. By definition, a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 25-29 is considered overweight, whereas 30 and up is obese. You can calculate your own BMI online at

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/Index.html> . What we as an overweight population don't want to hear about are the implications of obesity. Regardless, it is important to review a few obesity-related health risks:

- *Cancer. I mentioned in my previous article that obesity is estimated to cause 20 percent of all cancers
- * Heart disease and heart attacks
- * Strokes
- * Diabetes
- * Sleep apnea



To make things more depressing, the heavier the patient, the higher the likelihood he or she will die younger.

Here is some advice on what you can do to get the weight off, keep it off, and maintain an overall healthier lifestyle.

First, set a realistic goal. You may be setting yourself up for failure if you attempt to lose fifty pounds before the high school reunion in two months. Instead, focus on losing 10% of your current body weight. So, if you weigh 200 lbs, strive to lose 1-2 lbs a week to get down to 180 lbs. Then strive to maintain that weight for several months before continuing.

Ask yourself, 'What triggers make me want to eat?'. Is it out of boredom? Fatigue? Sitting at your work desk? Before starting your weight loss plan, keep a diary of when, where, and what you eat (try My Fitness Pal app on your smartphone). Then try limiting where you eat to just a few places (ie, dining room only), put your utensil down after each bite, chew your food a certain number of times, drink a sip of water after every bite.

Cut out the non-nutritive foods and drinks. I've had patients who lost weight by merely cutting out soda or alcohol or fruit drinks. If you hate plain water, drink non-caloric flavored water such as ICE sparkling water or use Crystal Light. I will dive into healthy foods vs non-healthy in the future. But I need to emphasize the importance of leaving out the fast foods, potato chips, red meats, processed and pre-prepared foods and sticking with whole grains (look for the first ingredient listed to be '100% whole grain'), fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy. When grocery shopping, stay around the perimeter of the store where you are getting fresher foods, rather than straying to the middle where you find more processed foods.

Get moving. If you don't exercise now, I don't recommend starting a daily workout. Instead, start with 1-2 times a week, then gradually work it in to your schedule. It must become part of your lifestyle and that involves gently kneading it in to your already busy schedule. Walk briskly with a friend or spouse for 30-40 minutes, working up to at least four times a week. Or go for a swim or invest in an elliptical or stationary bike. The more calories burned off the better the results

Other helpful hints include:

- * Establish a buddy system. Get your best friend, your mom, someone who will encourage you and lose weight with you, who will get you back on the wagon when you fall off. Likewise, encouraging your buddy is rewarding itself.
- * Involve yourself in a program. I prefer Weight Watchers or TOPS (Take Off Pounds

Sensibly).

- * Be positive. If you get off track, focus on ways to get back on track.

- * Remove all stress in your life. Ok, this isn't possible. But when you do fall victim to a stressful event, take a few deep breaths or if you must, snack on a low calorie food such as carrots that you kept on hand instead of indulging in that donut hiding in the back room.

- * Reward yourself, but not with food. You stayed on track all week, so treat yourself to a massage!

- * Learn to be strong. Food temptation is very difficult. Learn to say 'no' at social gatherings or during the potluck lunch at work. Then continue to stay strong. The more you do it, the better you'll get.

There are new FDA-approved medicines to help patients get the weight off. Medicines such as Belviq and Qsymia can be prescribed in select populations. These are designed to make you feel satiated and may increase your metabolism. But they will do very little without the concurrent lifestyle changes especially when it comes to keeping the weight off. Talk to your doctor about these for further information.

Remember, your goal should be about maintaining a healthy lifestyle, not to get back into your high school jeans. If you reset your frame of mind and tweak the goal, you are more likely to attain it and feel rewarded for your efforts in the meantime!

Michele Brannan is a certified Physician Assistant and has been in practice in the area for 10 years.

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