

**PENNY SAVER NEWS HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

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**Fight Fat with a Pill, For Real?**

It is “for real” that the FDA has approved a pill for over the counter (OTC) sales that prevents some fat from being absorbed. It has been for sale in Europe for several years, and has been available by prescription here too. So far there is no evidence of major risk, so FDA has declared it safe and effective. The prescription name is Xenical®. You’ll be seeing it on the shelves, and plenty of ads to go along with it, under the name “Alli”™. But take a couple of deep breaths before you run out to buy it.

It is being sold to treat obesity. It works by blocking our stomachs from absorbing some of the fat from our foods. If you are all ready eating a low fat diet and don’t have much fat in your meals, then it won’t have a lot of effect. Research has shown that up to 30%, or 1 teaspoon out of every tablespoon of fat is blocked. But that is at the high levels in prescription doses. Since the OTC doses will be weaker, less fat will be blocked.

It only works when there is fat in your stomach, and only works while it is there. So you have to take it with the fatty meal. You may take it up to three times a day, once with each meal. The package will warn you to not take it with a fat free meal or on an empty stomach.

Now if you’re thinking about what’s happening here, you might be wondering what will happen to the fat that isn’t absorbed. That’s where some of the problems come in. If that fat is not absorbed it keeps on going into your intestines. There are some bacteria that live in your intestines that might not mind making their own meal of that fat. Some people find they get a lot of gas or stomach pains when they take the medications.

If no bacteria use the fat, it still has to go someplace. Many people find their stools become oily or fatty when they go to the bathroom. Some people find they have to run to the bathroom more often, or have to get there very, very fast. And some people find they have 'leakage' problems. The oil just oozes on out.

Those are the embarrassing or uncomfortable problems. A less visible but maybe more serious problem is what happens to the vitamins we usually absorb with our fat. Vitamins A, D, E and K, and the phytonutrient and pre-vitamin A compound called beta-carotene travel in fat. If we are not absorbing the fat we are probably not absorbing these vitamins either. We know that taking these in a pill does not do us as much good as getting them in food. So taking supplement pill won't solve the problem.

Some people do seem to become allergic to it. They start itching, get a skin rash or redness, some even get hives. They need to stop taking it and go see a doctor.

Some medicines also travel in fat. Some medicines interact with the active ingredients in this pill. Warfarin, cyclosporine, pravastatin and some medicines for diabetes can all be affected. There is a warning that pregnant and breastfeeding women should not use it. And people who have or in the past had gallstones or gall bladder disease, chronic malabsorption problems, anorexia or bulimia are warned to not take this medicine. Just because you can buy it over the counter without a prescription does not mean that it is harmless!

As with any medication, be sure to read the label, check the conditions and talk to your doctor or pharmacist before you start a new medicine. In the meantime, here's a reduced fat, high vitamin salad that you can make a whole meal on. Couscous is great because it cooks so fast. You'll have dinner ready in time to sit and read the paper too. Enjoy!

#### Tomato, Shrimp and Couscous Salad

1 6-oz pkg roasted garlic couscous

8 oz cooked shrimp, peeled, deveined

2 ripe fresh Florida tomatoes

1 yellow bell pepper, chopped

½ C low fat Italian salad dressing

½ C crumbled feta cheese

1/4 C sliced green onions

Prepare couscous according to the directions on the package. Let stand until cool. Cut tomatoes in wedges. Combine shrimp, tomatoes, pepper and half the salad dressing in bowl and mix gently. Cover and refrigerate to marinate. To serve, combine couscous, cheese, green onions and rest of salad dressing in large bowl. Mix gently and divide evenly on 4 plates. Top each plate with a quarter of the shrimp mixture. Serve cold. Serves 4.

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