

Obesity

A Modern-Day Epidemic

Insight and Outlook from IMS HEALTH

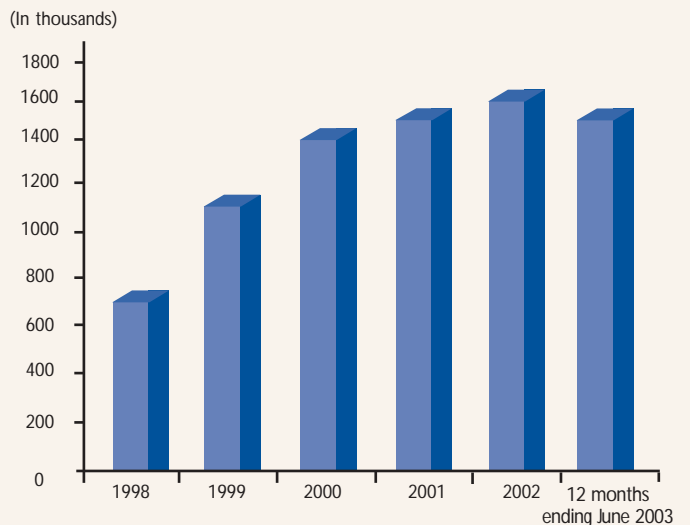
The World Health Organization recently reported that obesity has reached epidemic proportions, with more than 300 million adults being clinically obese and 1 billion adults classified as overweight. Obesity and being overweight are commonly determined using body mass index (BMI). A BMI of over 30 is defined as obese, and a BMI of 25 to 29 is defined as overweight.

For 2001, Statistics Canada reported that 32% of Canadian adults were overweight. Health Canada warns that being overweight poses an increased risk for certain health problems, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, stroke, and certain forms of cancer.

Obesity by the numbers

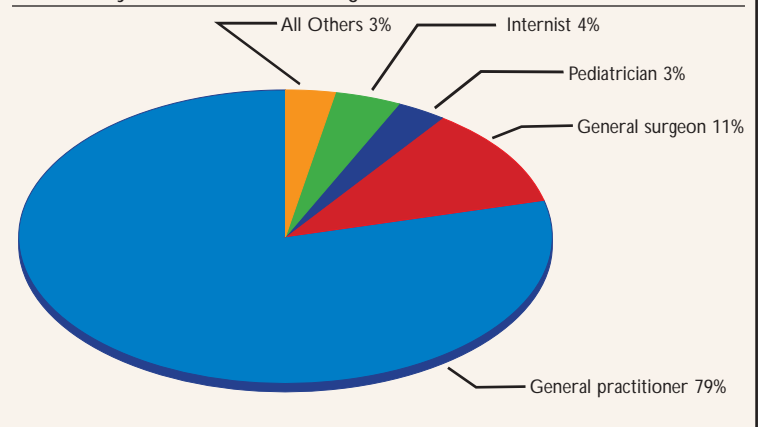
- An estimated 1.5 million visits for obesity were made to Canadian office-based physicians in the 12 months ending June 2003. The number of visits for obesity has doubled since 1998 (Figure 1).
- The most consulted physicians were general practitioners (79%), followed by general surgeons (11%), and internists (4%) (Figure 2).
- The majority of visits to office-based physicians were made by women (69%), while 31% were made by men. The age breakdown is seen in Table 1.
- In 36% of visits, a drug therapy was recommended. The drugs most often recommended for obesity are listed in in Figure 3.
- Canadian retail pharmacies dispensed an estimated 409,000 prescriptions for anti-obesity medications in the 12 months ending June 2003. This number was a 174% increase from the 149,000 prescriptions dispensed in 1998 (Figure 4).

Figure 1. Number of visits made to office-based physicians for obesity.



Source: IMS Health Canada, CDTI.

Figure 2. Visits to office-based physicians for obesity in 12 months ending June 2003.



Source: IMS Health Canada, CDTI.

Table 1

Age/gender breakdown of visits to office-based physicians for obesity (12 months ending June 2003)

Age (years)	Male	Female
All ages	31%	69%
0-19	12%	4%
20-39	28%	37%
40-59	39%	48%
60+	21%	11%

Source: IMS Health Canada, CDTI.

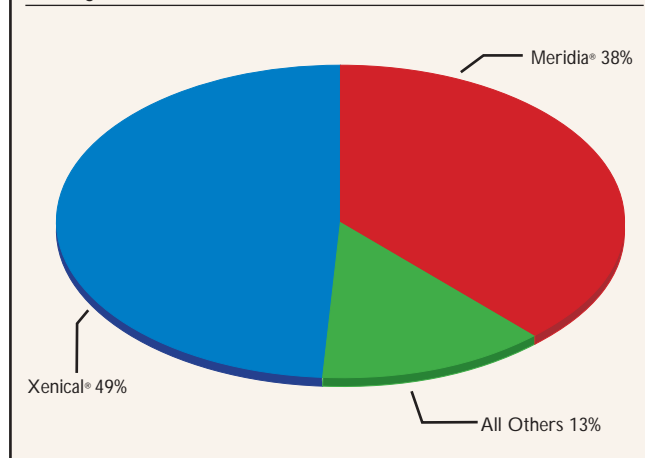
What is being prescribed?

The introduction of two new anti-obesity preparations has contributed to the growth in prescriptions for this category of drugs. Older prescription medications, such as Ionamin™ and Tenuate™, were appetite suppressants recommended for short-term use. The newer medications act differently and are recommended for long-term use.

Xenical®, introduced in May 1999, helps with weight loss by interfering with the absorption of dietary fat. Xenical can be prescribed to obese patients for weight loss, weight management, and in combination with antidiabetic agents in order to improve blood glucose control in obese patients with Type 2 diabetes.

Meridia®, introduced in March 2001, acts in two ways: it helps reduce food intake through enhancement

Figure 3. Drugs most often recommended in 12 months ending June 2003.

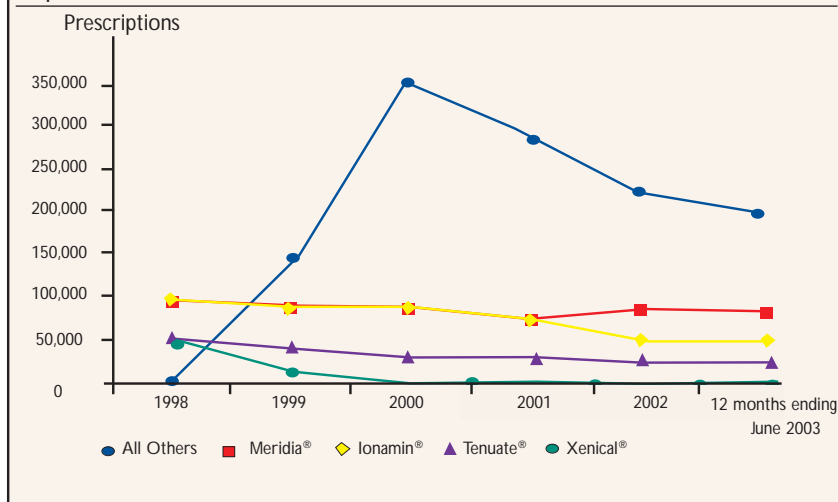


Source: IMS Health Canada, CDTI.

of satiety, and it increases energy expenditure by raising the body's heat production. Meridia is prescribed to obese patients as part of a weight management program.

Treatment with anti-obesity drugs should only be recommended as part of a weight reduction program. For long-lasting results, it is important that patients make changes to their diet and lifestyle. **CPM**

Figure 4. Estimated number of anti-obesity prescriptions dispensed from 1998 to June 2003.



Source: IMS Health Canada, CompuScript.

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