

Features associated with diet pill use in individuals with eating disorders

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Abstract

We investigated the relation between diet pill use and eating disorder subtype, purging and other compensatory behaviors, body mass index (BMI), tobacco and caffeine use, alcohol abuse or dependence, personality characteristics, and Axis I and Axis II

Abbreviations: AN, Anorexia Nervosa; BN, Bulimia Nervosa; RAN, Restricting type, Anorexia Nervosa; PAN, Purging type, Anorexia Nervosa; BAN, Binging type, Anorexia Nervosa; PBN, Purging type, Bulimia Nervosa; NPBN, Non-purging type, Bulimia Nervosa; ANBN, Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa; EDNOS, Eating Disorder Not-Otherwise-Specified: Types 1, 2, and 3.

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disorders in 1,345 participants from the multisite Price Foundation Genetics Studies. Diet pill use was significantly less common in women with restricting type of AN than in women with other eating disorder subtypes. In addition, diet pill use was associated with the use of multiple weight control behaviors, higher BMI, higher novelty seeking, and the presence of anxiety disorders, alcohol abuse or dependence, and borderline personality disorder. Findings suggest that certain clinical and personality variables distinguish individuals with eating disorders who use diet pills from those who do not. In the eating disorder population, vigilant screening for diet pill use should be routine clinical practice.

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Abuse of diet pills by individuals with eating disorders is well-documented clinically, with prevalence estimates reported as high as 50% (Celio et al., 2006; Mitchell, Pomeroy, & Huber, 1988; Roerig et al., 2003; Steffen, Roerig, Mitchell, & Crosby, 2006). However, empirical studies of features associated with abuse of diet pills are lacking. Given potential adverse effects associated with abuse of these agents (e.g., side effects, tolerance, withdrawal) (Carek & Dickerson, 1999; Dietz, 1981; Shekelle, Morton, & Maglione, 2003), particularly in populations already at elevated medical risk, it is important to explicate the nature of diet pill abuse and its consequences in individuals with eating disorders.

Accordingly, the aims of this study were to report the prevalence of lifetime diet pill use across eating disorder subtypes and identify factors associated with their use. We hypothesized that individuals with the restricting type of anorexia nervosa (RAN) would use diet pills less frequently than those with other subtypes. This may be due to the documented hesitancy of individuals with RAN to use medications of any variety (Kaplan & Olmsted, 1997), and the presence of low novelty seeking/elevated harm avoidance in this subgroup (Klump et al., 2000), which may render them less likely to experiment with anorexogenic agents. We also hypothesized that diet pill use would be positively associated with various purging behaviors (i.e., vomiting, laxative use, diuretic use, emetic use), highest lifetime BMI, excessive exercise, tobacco use, caffeine use and alcohol abuse or dependence, impulsivity, and novelty seeking. Further, we hypothesized that diet pill use would be positively associated with trait anxiety reflecting that greater anxiety and worry about weight gain may prompt the use of more substances to achieve lower weight. In addition we hypothesized that diet pill use would be associated with specific Axis I (anxiety and alcohol abuse or dependence) and Axis II disorders acknowledging the co-occurrence of anxious and impulsive traits in individuals with eating disorders (Cassin & von Ranson, 2005; Fichter, Quadflieg, & Rief, 1994) and the likelihood of these traits either alone or in combination leading to more extreme measures to decrease anxiety associated with weight.

1. Methods

1.1. Participants

Participants were from two cohorts recruited for the multisite International Price Foundation Genetic Studies of Eating Disorders: one ascertained through a proband with BN (“BN Affected Relative Pair Study”; Kaye et al., 2004) and another ascertained through a proband with AN and including their parents (“AN Trios”). These studies were designed to identify susceptibility loci contributing to risk for eating disorders. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants, and all sites received approval from their local Institutional Review Board. Brief descriptions of each study are provided below.

1.1.1. BN Affected Relative Pair Study (BN-ARP)

Probands and female and male biological relatives affected with AN, BN, or Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS) were recruited from 10 sites in North America and Europe including Pittsburgh, New York, Los Angeles, Toronto, Munich, Philadelphia, Pisa, Fargo, Minneapolis, and Boston. Probands were required to meet modified DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 1994) lifetime diagnosis of BN, purging type (PBN), where purging must have included regular vomiting, with other means of purging also allowed, and binge eating and vomiting must have occurred at least twice a week for a duration of at least six months. For the

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