Oligofructose Supplement Tied to Modest Losses

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NEW ORLEANS — Overweight and obese adults who supplemented their meals with oligofructose—a type of soluble dietary fiber derived from chicory root—lost about 1 kg of body fat over a 12-week period in the absence of dieting and exercise.

In the placebo-controlled study, the 21 participants who used the supplement also decreased by twofold their blood levels of the appetite-inducing hormone ghrelin over a 6-hour meal test. No reduction was seen in the 18 subjects taking a placebo, Canadian investigators reported in a poster presentation at the annual meeting of NAASO, the Obesity Society.

Lead investigator Jill Parnell, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Calgary (Alta.), and her associates have shown in animal studies that oligofructose modulates satiety-hormone secretion and, as a result, decreases energy intake. It also improves lipid profiles and blood glucose levels.

To see if oligofructose would have similar effects in a clinical trial, the investigators randomized participants (32 women and 7 men) to receive 21 g of oligofructose or an equicaloric amount of maltodextrin as placebo. Both substances were given as a white powder stirred into a beverage of the subjects' choice before their breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

The average body mass index (BMI) for individuals in both groups was 30 kg/m^2.

Those in the supplement group had lost an average of 1 kg of body fat without losing muscle mass. "We used a DXA [dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry] scan to look at body composition, and we could see that all of the reduction was coming from fat mass," Ms. Parnell said.

Placebo group members gained weight (0.5 kg on average), according to findings of the study, which was sponsored by the Canadian Institute of Health Research. ■