

Gelesis Emerges From Stealth With Obesity Medical Device Treatment

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Gelesis Inc. has lifted the veil on a medical-device treatment for obesity designed to leave patients feeling full after smaller meals.

The venture-backed company's super-absorbent hydrogel, made from food components, is administered in the form of small particles enclosed in capsules. Patients would take about two or three capsules with a couple glasses of water before each meal.

Once in the stomach, the particles absorb water and swell to hundreds of times their original size. This not only reduces the amount of room in the stomach for food, but also helps induce the transmission of signals to the brain that bring about a feeling of satiety, according to the company.

The particles when swollen have the same elasticity and viscosity as foods. People who have ingested them say they feel as though they have eaten a large meal, according to one of the company's investors, Daphne Zohar, managing partner of PureTech Ventures, which co-founded Gelesis in 2006. The particles also help keep food in the stomach longer, which reduces the urge to eat.

In the intestines, the particles slow the absorption of sugars and fatty acids. Afterward, they degrade in the colon, according to the company. The components used in the product are undisclosed, but Zohar said they have been used in foods for many years.

Gelesis recently completed a first-in-man study in 95 normal, overweight and obese subjects. In that study participants receiving the product, called Attiva, felt more satiated after meals than those taking a placebo.

In addition, people taking Attiva before lunch said they felt less hungry before dinner. Gelesis presented these results at the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists 19th Annual Meeting and Clinical Congress on Thursday.

Because Attiva works through a mechanical action and not a pharmacological one, it is considered a medical device. The company now plans to conduct additional studies, including tests to see whether Attiva helps people eat less and lose weight.

While existing surgical treatments for obesity are reserved for the severely overweight, Attiva may be an option for those with less-serious weight problems, Zohar said.

Several venture-backed medical-device companies are developing less-invasive treatments for obesity, including GI Dynamics Inc., whose EndoBarrier Gastrointestinal Liner is placed in the gastrointestinal tract to create a barrier between food and the wall of the intestine.

Gelesis expects the U.S. regulatory pathway for Attiva to be a Premarket Approval. It has yet to determine when it plans to file for regulatory approval in the U.S. and Europe.

Gelesis, based in Boston, has raised about \$16 million from Cape Family Fund, Lansing Brown Investments, OrbiMed Advisors, PureTech Ventures and Queensland BioCapital Funds Pty. Ltd.

The company, which has also received grant money, is talking with potential partners and is well-funded for now, Zohar said.

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