

# Get the skinny on GLP-1 agonist meds

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Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is beneficial for a number of reasons. A healthy weight lowers a person's chance of developing diabetes, sleep apnea, certain cancers, heart disease, and various other health conditions. Some find that when they are at a healthy weight they have more energy and feel better about themselves overall.

People often lament that it is easy to put on weight, but shedding excess pounds is far more difficult. That is perhaps why there has been so much buzz surrounding the class of drug known as a GLP-1 agonist.

Medications with the brand names Ozempic, Wegovy, Zepbound, and Mounjaro have garnered substantial attention for their association with weight loss. Some of these prescriptions were originally designed to lower blood sugar levels in people with type 2 diabetes. But doctors quickly discovered the drugs had a knack for helping the same patients shed a lot of weight, and some prescribed the medications with that goal in mind. Drug manufacturers soon developed offerings of the drug that are expressly approved for use in weight loss. It may seem like everyone is taking a GLP-1 agonist these days, but individuals who are considering using one of these medications to help them lose weight should still do their own research prior to making that decision.

## It isn't a magic fix

Although weight loss is a byproduct of taking medications that contain semaglutide, the active ingredient in the Ozempic and Wegovy brands (Wegovy is simply double the dose of Ozempic and FDA approved for weight loss), there are some caveats. The Columbia Surgery Center for Metabolic and Weight Loss Surgery says the average person can lose 10 to 17 percent of his or her starting weight on these medications. For someone at 250 pounds, that would be, on the low end, a 25-pound weight loss. Although that's considerable, it doesn't provide the 60- or 70-pound weight loss that bariatric surgery can offer. Furthermore, UC Health says if someone loses weight with one of these medications, it is likely he or she may need to keep taking them forever to keep the weight off. Those who stop taking these drugs often gain weight back quite quickly.

## Explore the side effects

The side effects of these drugs tend to be similar. Health.com says they can include:



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- nausea and vomiting
- abdominal pain
- constipation or diarrhea
- headache
- belching
- fatigue

Higher dosages of these medications may also increase risk of kidney injury, pancreatitis, gallstones, and hypoglycemia. Some people also have complained about looking older due to dropping weight in the face, a condition known as "Wegovy face" or "Ozempic face."

## Consider the expense

Some health insurance plans do not cover the costs of these medications. In the United States, one month of Ozempic (1.0 mg dose) costs about \$900 without insurance, while Wegovy (2.4 mg dose) costs about \$1,350 without insurance, according to the Peterson-KFF Health System Tracker. In addition, due to increased demand, many GLP-1 agonists are listed on the FDA's Drug Shortages list. People also must consider their comfort level regarding injections, which is the form of delivery for these medications.

Weight loss medications are helping many people get their health on track, but they're not the answer for everyone. Individuals should have a discussion with their doctors about the pros and cons to GLP-1 agonist medications.