

Losing It!

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The pros and cons of game-changing GLP-1 and semaglutide weight loss medications, and 7 steps to an informed approach to successful long-term weight management

The meteoric rise in popularity of prescription GLP-1 and semaglutide weight loss medications over the past few years has given rise to an abundance of sensationalized accounts and misinformation about miracle cures, magic bullets, much of which leaves many people confused, fearful, and misinformed. To this end, here is a brief overview of GLP-1 and semaglutide weight loss medications, their benefits, risks and side-effects, and a seven-step approach to help determine whether a weight loss drug is right for you or someone you love.

A meteoric rise

Since this class of medications, developed in the early 2000s to treat Type 2 Diabetes, was approved to treat obesity in 2019, [usage](#) has soared a whopping 700 percent. Today, [close](#) to 12 percent — approximately one person in eight — of Americans have used these new medications. According to a recently [published](#) Gallup National Health and Well-being Index, obesity rates in America have declined from 39.9 percent in 2022 to 37 percent in 2025, translating to approximately 7.6 million fewer people in America suffering from obesity.

With the World Health Organization's recently published [guidelines](#) for use in combating obesity, the use of this category of drug is likely to continue to grow. Recent [studies](#) also indicate the potential for effective treatment of cardiovascular and other conditions. It is important for those considering these medications for weight loss to understand how these drugs work, and the lifestyle and dietary commitments that are critical to successful long-term weight loss and improved overall health and well-being.

How these medications work

In a [nutshell](#), GLP-1 medications (also called GLP-1 antagonists or glucagon-like peptides) mimic the naturally occurring GLP-1 hormone released in the intestine in response to food intake. The release of this hormone triggers the release of insulin, which helps manage blood glucose levels and produces sensations of satiation (feeling full). While the naturally occurring hormone produces a temporary effect, these medications last longer, resulting in reduced feelings of hunger, reduced [food noise](#) — intrusive thoughts and ruminations related to food and consumption — and slowed gastric emptying.

Risks, side effects, and benefits

The ability of these new weight loss medications to support weight loss is a clear, significant, and unquestionable benefit. The [risks](#) of obesity include widely recognised cardiovascular impacts and Type 2 Diabetes, and lesser known impacts of chronic inflammation, mental health [impacts](#), including depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety, and other health conditions that negatively impact one's

quality of life and longevity. (The statistically significant drop in obesity in America, as mentioned previously in this article, stands as a key benefit of these medications.) A 2024 study identified [positive](#) impacts on participants' mental health, including increased control over eating habits and behaviors, including [weight cycling](#), also known as yo-yo dieting.

Mild side-effects of these medications [include](#) gastrointestinal discomfort (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, and/or bloating), and more serious though rare gallbladder disorders and acute pancreatitis. Though extremely rare, a recent [rise](#) in deaths in the UK from pancreatitis related to the use of GLP-1 medications is raising concerns.

A recent study [reports](#) rapid weight gain after discontinuing weight-loss medications. Finally, of serious [concern](#) is the potentially long-term and possibly life-long commitment to these medications.

A comprehensive approach to long-term success

There is no question that GLP-1 and semaglutide weight loss drugs offer people struggling with obesity a new sense of hope for a healthier future.

In a world where we are bombarded with social media influencers and celebrities using their sizable audiences to impart their experiences, thoughts, and unsolicited advice, there is no substitute for sound medical advice and a solid, evidence-based approach to weight loss and long-term weight management. What these drugs are not is a simple, one-stop solution to a complex and often lifelong challenge.

Developing knowledge of how these drugs function in consultation with medical professionals, in concert with a lifelong commitment to overall health and well-being, is key to successful long-term weight loss.

7 Steps to an Informed Approach to Successful Long-term Weight Management

Familiarize yourself with how GLP-1 and other new weight loss medications work, and whether this category of medications could help you achieve your weight and wellness goals. (Remember that not all information sources are valid or equal. Rely on expert articles, interviews, and commentary, rather than social media influencers and celebrities, who may be paid for their commentary.)

Consult your GP about the possibility of prescribing a GLP-1 to manage your weight or Type 2 Diabetes.

Ask questions about your concerns, including lifestyle changes, the need for clinician monitoring of weight loss, dosage levels, diet adjustments, and which weight-loss medication aligns with your needs and long-term goals.

Make sure you understand the benefits, risks, and potential side effects of any medication.

Set healthy, realistic, and sustainable weight-loss goals in consultation with your doctor.

Commit to lifestyle changes, such as incorporating nutrient-rich foods into your diet, following an exercise regimen that includes resistance training to counteract muscle loss, and ongoing monitoring of your progress by your clinician.

Pay attention to your mental and physical health. Consult your physician if you are experiencing low mood, anxiety, or struggling to cope with lifestyle changes or intrusive thoughts. Your GP or family doctor can refer you to a mental health professional.