



GLP-1 Receptor Agonists (examples: liraglutide and semaglutide)
- Melanie Cree, MD, PhD

What are these medicines used for?

These medications were first developed to treat diabetes but have also been shown to have a significant effect of weight loss.

How do they work?

They work by affecting a hormone in your body that leads to decreased appetite, decreased food intake, and decreased rate that the stomach empties into the small intestine.

These medications may help you:

- Feel less hungry
- Lower food cravings
- Increase your feeling of control around eating habits

Like all weight loss medications, these medications work best in combination with healthy nutrition, physical activity, and sleep.

If I contact my insurance company to ask about coverage, what should I say?

- Daily injection: "Does my specific plan cover Saxenda for the indication of obesity?"
- Weekly injection: "Does my specific plan cover Wegovy for the indication of obesity?"
- Weekly injection: "Does my specific plan cover Zepbound for the indication of obesity?"

How should I take these medications?

These medications are given by a small injection under the skin ("subcutaneous") either once a day or once a week. The usual dosing is listed below, but please follow your medical provider's instructions for your specific plan.

- Liraglutide (brand name: Saxenda), subcutaneous, daily
 - o Week 1: 0.6mg every day
 - o Week 2: 1.2mg every day
 - o Week 3: 1.8mg every day
 - o Week 4: 2.4mg every day
 - o Week 5 and beyond: 3.0mg every day or maximum tolerated dose

Note: Daily dose may be split between pens. Please discuss this with your medical team or healthcare provider
Please go to the Saxenda for instructions and a video regarding the technique to give yourself injections:
www.saxenda.com

- Semaglutide (brand name: Wegovy), subcutaneous, weekly
 - o Week 1-4: 0.25mg once weekly
 - o Week 5-8: 0.5mg once weekly
 - o Week 9-12: 1mg once weekly
 - o Week 13-16: 1.7mg once weekly
 - o Week 17 and beyond: 2.4mg once weekly or maximum tolerated dose

Please go to the Wegovy for instructions and a video regarding the technique to give yourself injections:
www.wegovy.com



- Tirzepatide (brand name: Zepbound), subcutaneous, weekly
 - o Week 1-4: 2.5mg once weekly
 - o Week 5-8: 5mg once weekly
 - o Week 9-12: 7.5mg once weekly
 - o Week 13-16: 10mg once weekly
 - o Week 17-20: 12.5mg once weekly
 - o Week 21 and beyond: 15mg once weekly or maximum tolerated dose

Please go to the Zepbound for instructions and a video regarding the technique to give yourself injections:
[www. https://zepbound.lilly.com/](https://zepbound.lilly.com/)

What if I miss a dose?

Liraglutide:

- If a dose is missed, restart the next day. An extra dose or increase in dose should not be taken to make up for the missed dose.
- If more than 3 days have passed since the last dose, please contact your health care provider about how to restart the medication

Semaglutide and tirzepatide:

- If you miss a dose, and your next dose is more than 2 days (48 hours) away, take the missed dose when you remember
- If you miss a dose, and the next scheduled dose is less than 2 days away (48 hours), do not give the dose. Take your next dose on the regularly scheduled day.
- If you miss 2 or more doses, take the next dose on the regularly scheduled day or call your health care provider to talk about how to restart due to possible side effects.

Are these medications safe?

For weight loss, both liraglutide and semaglutide are FDA approved for age 12 years and older. This class of medication is also approved for people who have diabetes. As with any medication, there may be side effects. More serious things that can happen include allergic reactions, thyroid tumors, pancreatitis, gallbladder problems, kidney problems, and worsened depression.

Common Side Effects with GLP-1 Medications

If any of these side-effects are a big problem for you, please let your medical team know.

Constipation

Using a GLP1RA medications such as Wegovy/Ozempic, Zepbound/Monjauro or Trulicity or can cause symptoms of constipation such as having less frequent bowel movements or having harder stools that can be difficult to push out. If you have these symptoms, you can try:

- 1) Make sure that you are drinking enough water. This should be at least 64 ounces of fluid a day.
- 2) You can try a medication called Miralax. This is an over the counter medication. You start by mixing 1/2 of a capful of powder (there is a line on the inside of the cap of the bottle) in 8 ounces of water, or a sugar free flavor drink such as crystal light, once a day. You can increase the dose up to a full cap a day if needed. If you are still having problems with one cap a day, let your medical team know.
- 3) If you are not pooping and starting to get stomach pain, please contact your medical team.



Heart burn or other symptoms of reflux:

Using a GLP1RA medication such as Wegovy or Ozempic can cause symptoms of heartburn. This is because the medicine makes food stay in our stomach longer.

1) Dietary modification: Foods that cause heartburn can be different for each person. You should avoid foods that are associated with symptoms as determined by trials of individual foods. Options include:

- Avoid foods that tend to induce reflux by relaxing the muscle at the top of your stomach to let the food come back up: including chocolate, peppermint, and caffeinated beverages.
- Avoid acidic foods, including colas, orange juice, and tomato sauce.
- Avoid high-fat foods

2) Lifestyle changes:

- Positioning – Avoid the supine position soon after eating.
- Salivation – Promote salivation by either chewing gum or using oral lozenges. Salivation neutralizes refluxed acid, thereby increasing the rate of esophageal acid clearance.
- Alcohol, tobacco, and vaping – Avoid alcohol and tobacco (including passive exposure to tobacco smoke). Substances that contain nicotine reduce lower esophageal sphincter pressure, and smoking also diminishes salivation

3) Medications:

- Occasional use of antacids like TUMS are acceptable for short-term relief of symptoms
- If you are having symptoms every day and you have made changes to your food, you can take a heartburn medicine every day -start with famotadine, which is sold as Pepcid or Pepcid AC
- If you are still having symptoms with food changes and Pepcid every day, then you can switch to a stronger heartburn prevention and treatment medicine like omeprazole (prilosec - purple box) or lansoprazole (Prevacid-pink and teal box) - Generic brands are okay. This will be one pill once a day with your first meal of the day.

Nausea/Vomiting:

These symptoms are the worst after the first shot of a newly high dose. They normally start about 12-24 hours after the shot and last for a couple days. Most people find that these get better over time. Some tips to help manage this.

1) Timing: Consider taking your shot on a Friday so that if you have these side-effects, it doesn't happen when you are at school or work.

2) Eating: Don't skip meals. Eating small amounts can help the nausea go away.

3) Medications: Some people need a little bit of a medicine for nausea called Zofran. If you feel like you are really struggling, let your medical team know.

4) Drinking: If you are having a really hard time getting/keeping liquids in you, and your urine (pee) is dark yellow, please call your medical team.