Maintaining Muscle on GLP-1 and Other Weight Loss Medications

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The Important Idea

Weight loss usually includes some muscle loss. The aim is to shift the balance.

For people using medicines such as Mounjaro, Wegovy, Ozempic or other weight-loss medications, the goal is not simply to lose weight.

GLP-1 and other weight-loss medicines can reduce appetite and make food portions much smaller. This can be helpful, but it can also make it easier to under-eat protein and harder to fuel training.

Protein provides the building blocks for muscle. Resistance training gives your body the signal to keep using and maintaining muscle.You need both.

Why Muscle Matters

Muscle equals Function

- getting out of chairs
- climbing stairs
- balance and falls prevention
- glucose use and insulin sensitivity
- metabolism
- training capacity
- healthy ageing
- independence through midlife and older adulthood

Some muscle loss is expected during weight loss. The risk increases when weight loss is very fast, protein intake is low, or resistance training drops away.

Key Priorities - Protein & Resistance Training

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Protein - The Building Blocks

Protein becomes especially important when appetite is reduced. Many guidelines suggest protein targets of approximately 1.0–1.5 g/kg/day during active weight loss. However, using actual body weight can overestimate needs for some people, particularly at higher body weights.

For many adults, a practical daily target is often around:
80–120 g protein per day

Some people will need more. Some will need less. Medical history, appetite, age, weight-loss rate and training all matter.

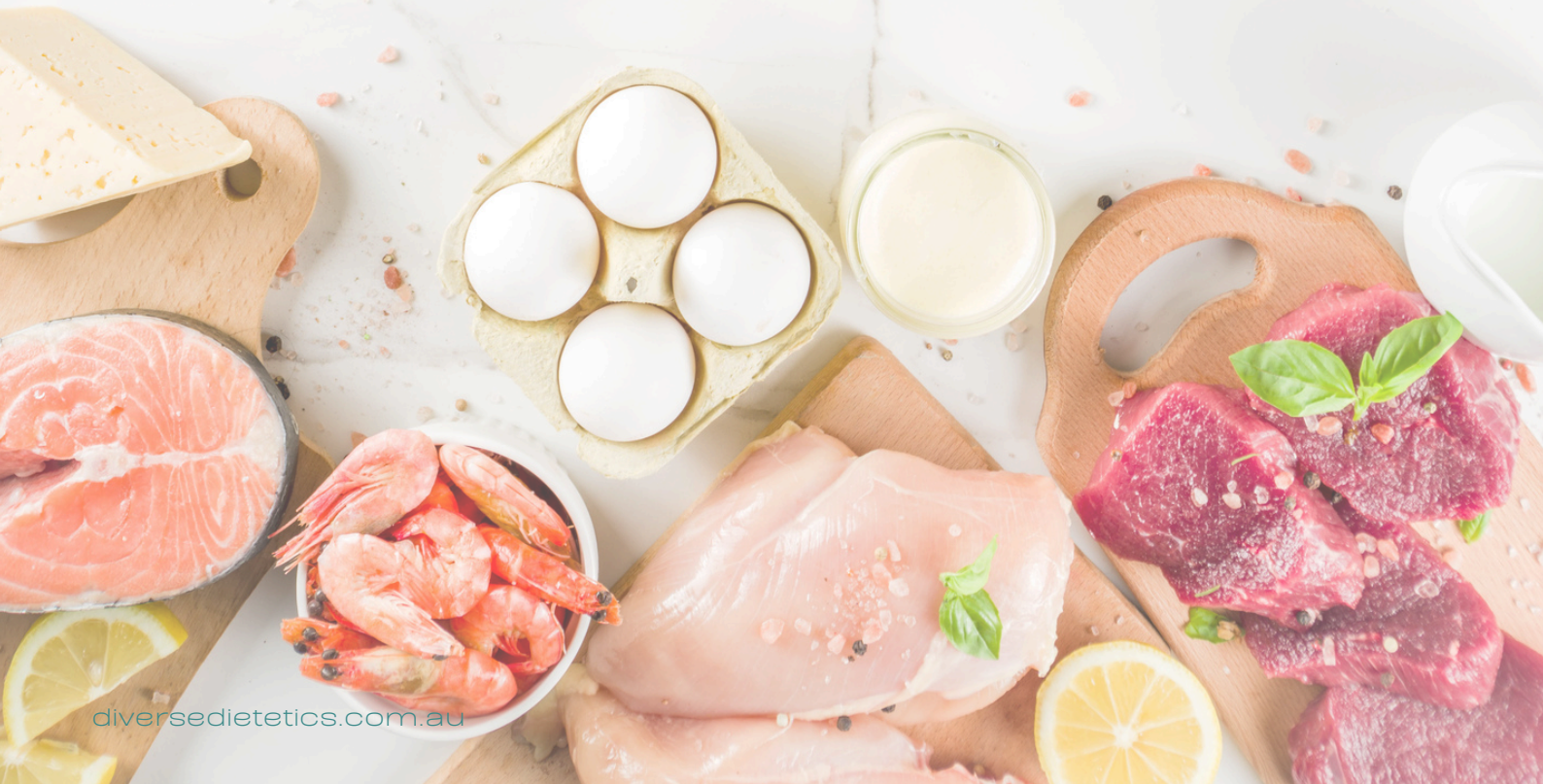
Your dietitian can help calculate a target that makes sense for your body and your situation.

Try to include protein at:

- breakfast
- lunch
- dinner
- one planned snack if appetite is low

If you get full quickly, eat the protein part of the meal first.

This does not mean carbohydrates or vegetables are unimportant. It simply means protein can be the easiest thing to miss when appetite disappears.



Strength training: The signal

Walking is excellent for health. It supports cardiovascular fitness, blood glucose management, mood, routine and general health.

But walking alone is usually not enough to protect muscle during weight loss. Muscle needs repeated challenge.

Aim for 2–3 resistance training sessions per week, if you can. This can be:

- gym-based
- home-based
- supervised by an Exercise Physiologist
- Pilates-style strength work
- resistance bands
- dumbbells
- machine weights
- simple progressive bodyweight exercises

You do not need to become a gym person. You just need a safe, **repeatable way** to ask your muscles to stay.

A useful starting point is choosing 3-4 bodyweight movements that use large muscle groups, such as:

- sit-to-stand
- wall push-up
- row or band pull
- step-up
- calf raise

Start where you are and progress slowly.

Strength training: Start where you are

Always check with your doctor before starting and consider seeing an Exercise Physiologist if you have pain, injury, frailty, falls risk, low confidence, or you are unsure how to start safely.

Level 1: getting started

Start with 2 short sessions per week.
Examples:

- sit-to-stand
- wall push-up
- calf raises
- step-ups

Try 1–2 sets of 8–12 repetitions.
This might not look impressive, but it counts.
Starting safely is better than waiting until you feel ready for a full program.

Level 2: building

Aim for 2–3 sessions per week.
Add:

- resistance bands
- dumbbells
- gym machines
- slightly harder bodyweight exercises

Include a mix of:

- push
- pull
- squat or stand
- hinge
- carry

Level 3: progressing

Progress gradually by increasing:

- load
- sets
- repetitions
- range of movement
- difficulty
- consistency

Protein in Whole Foods

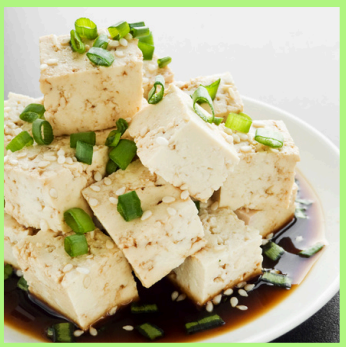
150g cooked chicken breast - ~45g

100g tinned salmon ~ 20-22g

100g tinned tuna ~20g

200g Greek Yoghurt - 10-17g

2 eggs - ~12g



100g Firm tofu - ~10-12g

100g Cooked red lentils - ~9g

60g nuts or seeds - ~8-10g

A simple muscle-supportive day when appetite is low

This is not a meal plan, it's a structure you can adapt. The aim is not to eat large meals. The aim is to eat enough protein often enough for your body to keep up.

Breakfast - Start with protein

Example: Greek yoghurt + berries + walnuts or eggs on wholegrain toast

Lunch - Protein first, then plants

Example: Tinned salmon or chicken + salad/veg + crackers, wrap or rice

Snack - Use it strategically

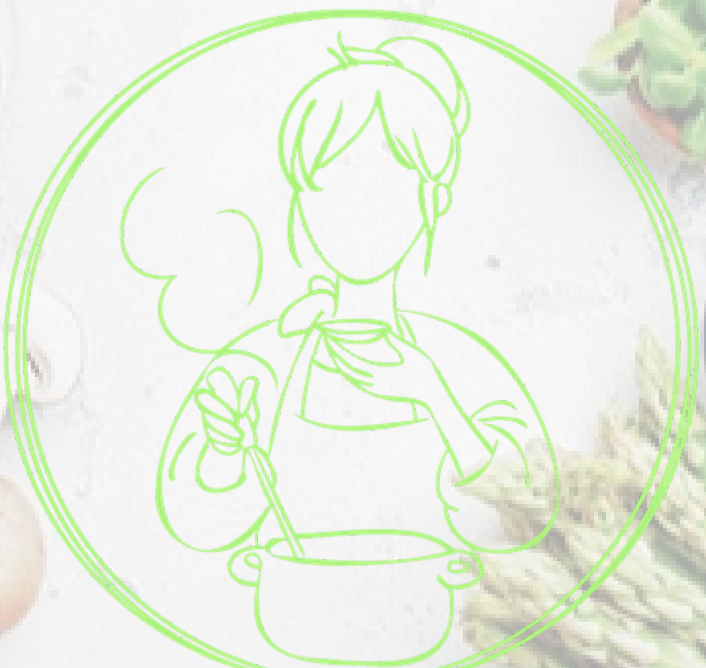
Examples: Milk, yoghurt, protein drink, edamame, nuts + fruit

Dinner - Anchor meal with protein

Example: Fish, chicken or lean meat + vegetables + purposeful carbs

Training days - Fuel enough to train

Example: Small protein + carb option after training if appetite is poor



Warning signs to bring to healthcare team:

Please bring these up with dietitian, your GP or your healthcare team.

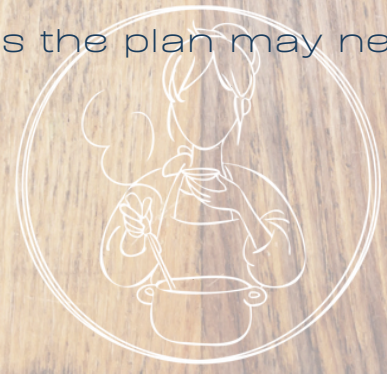
Nutrition red flags

- fatigue that is not improving
- hair shedding
- poor wound healing
- dizziness
- nausea stopping you from eating
- constipation
- regularly skipping meals
- rapid weight loss above your agreed plan
- difficulty meeting protein or fluid needs

Training and strength red flags

- feeling weaker week to week
- avoiding stairs
- struggling to get out of chairs
- new falls or loss of balance
- pain limiting movement
- no resistance training for more than 2–3 weeks
- feeling unsure how to start safely

These are signs the plan may need adjusting.



Choose 1 or 2 actionable strategies to start this week:

Know your protein target and write it down.

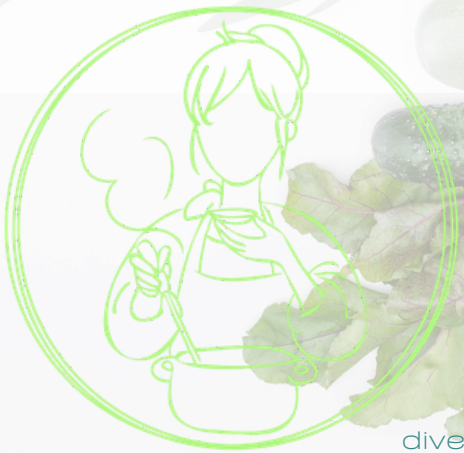
Add a protein anchor to breakfast.

Eat protein first at your lowest-appetite meal.

Book, plan or complete two strength sessions.

Keep fluids steady, especially if nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea or constipation are present.

Review weight-loss rate, strength and symptoms with your dietitian or healthcare team.



Evidence base

Mozaffarian D, et al. Nutritional priorities to support GLP-1 therapy for obesity. American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. 2025;122:344–367.

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Nunes EA, et al. Protein intake to support muscle mass and function in adults: systematic review and meta-analysis. British Journal of Sports Medicine. 2022.

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Nutrition support that fits real life.

This resource provides general nutrition information only and does not replace personalised medical or dietetic advice. Protein targets, supplementation, medication decisions and exercise recommendations should be discussed with your healthcare team, especially if you have kidney disease, complex medical conditions, are pregnant or breastfeeding, or have had bariatric surgery.

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