

DIABETES DRUGS AND WEIGHT LOSS... IS THIS A GOOD IDEA?



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As we all know by now, there is a class of type 2 diabetes drugs that not only improve blood sugar control, but may also lead to weight loss. You may recognize some of these as Saxenda, Victoza, Ozempic, Trulicity and Jardiance. Wegovy, the newest of these drugs, was specifically designed, approved and marketed as a weight loss drug. These medications are GLP-1 agonists, which means they mimic a naturally produced hormone called glucagon-like peptide 1. This hormone is partly responsible for regulating hunger. The release of this hormone can help delay emptying of the stomach, so food stays in your stomach longer and you can feel fuller for a longer amount of time. GLP-1 also helps suppress another hormone called glucagon, again resulting in diminishing your hunger. These GLP-1 agonist drugs were originally used to treat type 2 diabetes by increasing the release of insulin and lowering blood sugar levels. Researchers also noticed that patients using these drugs seemed to be less hungry and so, began to lose weight. Randomized, double-blind studies using GLP-1 agonist drugs found that participants who received a once weekly abdominal injection of the drug and made diet and exercise modifications had significant reductions in weight, waist circumference, HbA1c levels, systolic blood pressure, total cholesterol and triglycerides. Keep in mind that participants who received the placebo drug also made changes to their diet and exercise habits. These double-blind clinical trials were also funded by the manufacturer of the drug. Interesting? This could mean that there is a potential for bias and conflict of interest to influence the study results.

The use of these GLP-1 drugs are not without their possible side effects. These may include nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, heartburn/GERD, bloating, dizziness, fatigue, headaches, belching, flatulence, constipation and diarrhea. Less common side-effects are allergic reactions, acute pancreatitis, gallstones, diabetic retinopathy and thyroid C-cell tumors. The cost of these medications can be prohibitive, even with insurance. They can run from \$1200-2500/month. Of course, there are coupons out there that do help.

Weight loss medications usually focus on reducing one's appetite. However, overeating is not the sole cause of higher body weight. So, simply eating less may not result in weight loss. Our body weight and our ability to modify our weight can also be influenced by genetics, sex, hormones, medications, health conditions, stress levels, sleep quality and quantity, physical activity, age and a history of dieting and/or weight fluctuations. Some of these factors are within our control and some are not.

Emotional eating behavior may also be another reason why some people may not lose weight with these new medications. So, what is emotional eating? It is simply one's tendency to eat in response to negative emotions in order to relieve stress. When we "emotionally" eat, we often ignore our body's internal satiety or "fullness" signals. Emotional eating is often associated with obesity, less weight loss from bariatric surgery and weight gain after weight loss. Approximately 60% of people with obesity are emotional eaters, and, are usually women.

So, if we want to approach weight loss in a different way, without medications, here are some tips:

- *Make more homemade meals. It doesn't have to be elaborate, it just has to be clean. When we eat out at restaurants or get take out meals, we generally eat larger portions and make poor choices.*
- *Eat more fiber and protein at each meal.*

Fiber and protein take longer to digest and so help us to feel more satisfied.

- *Limit added sugars. This includes foods and sugary beverages.*
- *Increase physical activity. This helps us burn more calories, supports lean muscle mass and it's great for our mental well-being.*
- *Get enough sleep. When we are sleep-deprived we generally make poor food choices.*
- *Work with a professional. This can be a clinical nutritionist, a personal trainer, a mental health professional or an endocrinologist if need be.*

Whether we use weight loss drugs, have bariatric surgery or work with a nutritionist, we all have to make healthy choices every day. It's not easy but it is definitely worth it. Remember, the choices you make for yourself can influence your children, your partner, your family and your friends. Be a positive influence.

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