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For Naturopathic Medicine & Functional Nutrition

How GLP-1 Medications Work For Weight Management

What are GLP-1 Medications?

Semaglutide and Tirzepatide injectable medications, sometimes referred to as GLP-1 medications, are medications that have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for type 2 diabetes management and weight management.

Although other GLP-1 medications do exist, injectable Semaglutide and Tirzepatide are the ones people are typically referring to when discussing today's popular weight management medications. Brand names for injectable Semaglutide include Ozempic and Wegovy and brand names for injectable Tirzepatide include Mounjaro and Zepbound. Wegovy and Zepbound are approved for weight management for those with obesity or those overweight with weight-related medical problems. Ozempic and Mounjaro, although approved for type 2 diabetes management, are commonly prescribed off-label for weight management. These medications work by mimicking a natural hormone in the body called GLP-1.

There are also compounded versions of injectable Semaglutide and Tirzepatide on the market, but these are not FDA approved, meaning the FDA does not review them for safety, quality, or effectiveness before they are marketed.



What is GLP-1?

GLP-1, which stands for glucagon-like peptide-1, is a natural hormone produced in the intestines. When you eat, GLP-1 is released into the bloodstream. It travels to the hypothalamus and activates receptors in the brain that reduce feelings of hunger, making you feel full and satisfied. GLP-1 also slows down the movement of food through the stomach, reducing gastric emptying. This means food stays in your stomach longer, making you feel full for a longer time. In addition, GLP-1 directs the pancreas to release insulin, helping to control blood sugar levels.

When your natural GLP-1 isn't working well, injectable Semaglutide or Tirzepatide can step in to keep hunger, fullness, and blood sugar well-regulated.

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How Do They Work?

Injectable Semaglutide and Tirzepatide medications mimic the GLP-1 hormone in your body and activate GLP-1 hormone receptors to increase its effects. These medications help in three main ways:

Appetite control: By activating GLP-1 receptors in the brain, Injectable Semaglutide and Tirzepatide medications enhance the signals that promote fullness and satisfaction leading to a reduction in the amount of food you eat.

Slows digestion: Food stays in your stomach longer when using injectable Semaglutide or Tirzepatide medications, prolonging the feeling of fullness. These medications signal the stomach to hold onto food longer, slowing down the process of moving food into the small intestine. This helps to control hunger and prevent overeating.

Reduction in food noise: Injectable Semaglutide and Tirzepatide medications may help to quiet thoughts about food. Although more research is needed to fully understand the mechanism behind it, people taking these medications often report a reduction in food noise (persistent or intrusive thoughts about food).

What is the Difference Between Tirzepatide & Semaglutide?

- Injectable Semaglutide and Tirzepatide are both GLP-1 receptor agonists - they activate the GLP-1 hormone receptors in the body.
- While injectable Semaglutide is only a GLP-1 receptor agonist, injectable Tirzepatide is a dual GLP-1 and GIP receptor agonist. This means that it also activates GIP hormone receptors in the body. Similar to GLP-1, GIP (glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide) is released in your gastrointestinal tract after you eat and stimulates the pancreas to release insulin, helping with blood sugar regulation.
- Research so far indicates that injectable Tirzepatide may lead to higher rates of weight loss than injectable Semaglutide.

Both injectable Semaglutide and Tirzepatide are used in type 2 diabetes management and weight management.

Disclaimer. The content provided in this handout only applies to FDA-approved injectable Semaglutide and Tirzepatide medications (Wegovy, Ozempic, Zepbound, and Mounjaro). It does not apply to other weight loss medications or compounded versions of Semaglutide or Tirzepatide. Consult with your physician for medication management.