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For Naturopathic Medicine & Functional Nutrition

Managing the Side Effects of GLP-1 Medications

Injectable Semaglutide and Tirzepatide (sometimes referred to as GLP-1 medications)* mimic the natural hormone GLP-1 to control blood sugar, regulate appetite, and increase feelings of fullness. In doing so, they slow the movement of food from the stomach to the intestines, which can lead to side effects such as nausea and constipation. These medications may also cause rapid emptying of the intestines in some individuals, which can lead to diarrhea. Fortunately, there are nutritional strategies to manage these side effects.

**Brand names include Wegovy and Ozempic (injectable Semaglutide) and Zepbound and Mounjaro (injectable Tirzepatide). Other GLP-1 medications exist, but these are the most effective and popular for weight management.*

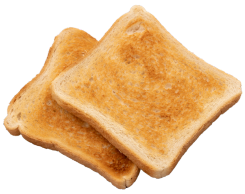
Nausea

The body's heightened sensitivity to feeling full can cause nausea, especially early in treatment as the body adjusts to the medication. Higher doses of injectable Semaglutide or Tirzepatide may intensify this side effect, as the delay in gastric emptying becomes more pronounced.

Strategies to Help Manage Nausea:



- **Mindful eating** can help you recognize early signs of fullness, which can help prevent overeating and reduce nausea.
- **Ginger** (ginger tea, ginger chews, fresh ginger) is well-known for its anti-nausea properties.



- **Small, frequent meals** reduce the chance of feeling overly full, which can worsen nausea.
- **Cold or room-temperature foods** are often more tolerable when feeling nauseous.



- **Bland, easy-to-digest foods** are gentle on the stomach and less likely to trigger nausea. Ex: banana, rice, toast, apple sauce)
- **Staying hydrated** with small sips throughout the day prevents dehydration, which can worsen nausea.



- **Protein-rich snacks** - Protein stabilizes blood sugar, which can help reduce nausea. Ex. cottage cheese, greek yogurt, tuna, or hardboiled eggs.



- **Peppermint** (peppermint tea or candies) can help relax the stomach muscles and reduce nausea.
- **Avoid large, rich, or greasy meals**, which are harder to digest and can trigger or worsen nausea.

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Constipation

Semaglutide and Tirzepatide injectable medications delay gastric emptying, which slows down food movement through the intestines, which may lead to constipation. With a reduced appetite, you may be eating less fiber-rich foods, which can also contribute to constipation.

Strategies to Manage Constipation:

- **Increase Fiber Intake**: Focus on adding soluble and insoluble fiber to your meals.
  - Both soluble and insoluble fiber help to keep stools soft and easy to pass.
  - Soluble fiber: Oats, apples, beans.
  - Insoluble fiber: Whole grains, leafy greens, nuts.
  - Increase fiber intake gradually to avoid bloating and discomfort.



- **Stay Hydrated:** Drink plenty of water to help move food and waste through your digestive system.
  - Water softens stools, making them easier to pass and helps prevent constipation.
  - Drink 8-10 glasses of water per day.
  - Tip: Pair fiber-rich foods with water to help the digestive process.



- **Be Active:** Regular physical activity can help stimulate digestion and prevent constipation.
  - Regular movement helps stimulate the muscles in your intestines, promoting better digestion.
  - Take daily walks for 20-30 minutes.
  - Light stretching or yoga can also support gut motility.



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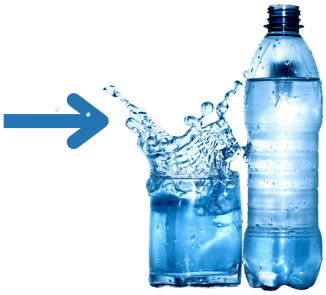
Managing the Side Effects of GLP-1 Medications

Diarrhea

Semaglutide and Tirzepatide injectable medications slow down digestion, but they may cause rapid emptying of the intestines in some individuals. Diarrhea is a common side effect as your body adjusts to the medication, especially during the early stages of treatment.

Strategies to Manage Diarrhea:

- **Stay Hydrated**: Diarrhea can cause fluid loss, so it's important to drink plenty of water.
  - Drink 8-10 glasses of water per day.
  - Add electrolyte drinks or broths to replace lost minerals like sodium and potassium.



- **Focus on Soluble Fiber**: Soluble fiber found in foods like oats, bananas, and apples firm up stool.
  - Soluble fiber absorbs water and helps bulk up stool, making it easier to pass.



- **Avoid Trigger Foods**: Limit high-fat, greasy, or spicy foods which can worsen diarrhea.
  - High-fat, greasy foods can irritate the gut and worsen diarrhea.
  - Spicy foods can cause additional irritation in the digestive tract.



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.