

GLP-1 Medications: Separating Fact From Fiction



GLP-1 agonist medications have been in the news for a couple of years now, and there is a lot of misinformation surrounding how they work, how to get them, who should be using them, etc. Read on to learn more about this group of drugs and whether they can really deliver on all their promises.

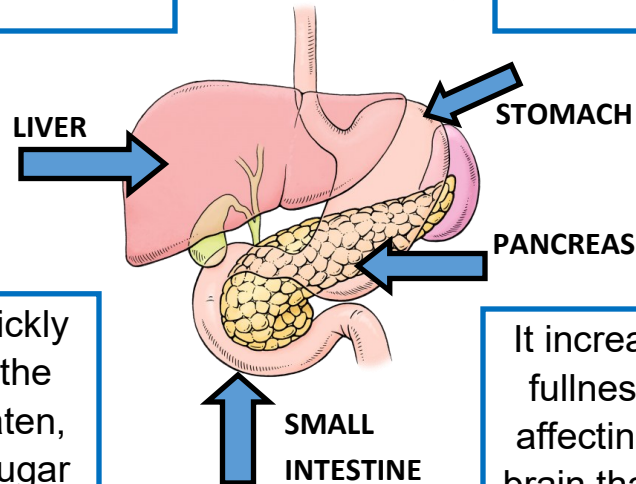
Background:

- ⇒ Glucagon-Like Peptide (GLP) 1 was first discovered in the 1980's, and is a hormone that helps to improve insulin sensitivity, promote satiety (feeling of fullness) and delay gastric emptying. However, it does not stay in the system for very long, so it is difficult to replicate.
- ⇒ In 1992, a researcher studying the Gila monster discovered a hormone that worked very similarly to GLP-1, but lasted longer and is the basis for the class of medications known as GLP-1 Receptor Agonists.
- ⇒ The first GLP-1 medication to be approved and marketed for treating Type 2 diabetes was exenatide, sold as Byetta, in 2005.
- ⇒ Today, there are several injectables, including semaglutide (sold as Ozempic or Wegovy), liraglutide (Victoza), tirzepatide (Mounjaro or Zepbound), and dulaglutide (Trulicity).
- ⇒ Semaglutide is also sold in tablet form, as Wegovy (just approved by FDA) and Rybelsus.

How does this type of medication work?

It mimics the hormone GLP-1, which is made in the small intestine and signals the pancreas to release insulin after eating

When insulin is released, that stops glucagon (another hormone that raises blood sugar) from going into the blood stream



It slows down how quickly the stomach digests the food that has been eaten, preventing as much sugar going into the bloodstream

It increases the feeling of fullness after eating, by affecting the areas of the brain that process feelings of hunger and fullness

Why might my doctor prescribe this?

There are currently only a couple of conditions in which GLP-1 medications could be prescribed: Type 2 diabetes, obesity, and most recently, sleep apnea.



Type 2 diabetes:

- ⇒ If oral medications (like Metformin) are not working
- ⇒ If you have been unable to reach your A1C goals with lifestyle changes
- ⇒ If you have additional conditions like heart or kidney disease and are unable to reach your blood sugar target within 3 months



Obesity:

- ⇒ If previous weight loss methods have been unsuccessful

Sleep Apnea:

- ⇒ Currently only Zepbound is approved for use in treating sleep apnea in adults with obesity



What are possible side effects of using a GLP-1?

Most Common:

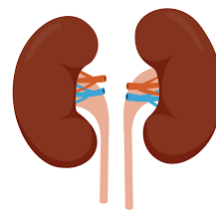
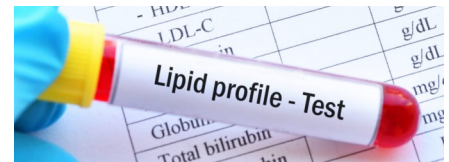
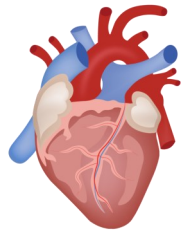
- ⇒ Loss of appetite
- ⇒ Nausea
- ⇒ Vomiting
- ⇒ Diarrhea

Less Common:

- ⇒ Dizziness
- ⇒ Increased heart rate
- ⇒ Headaches
- ⇒ Indigestion

Rare but Severe:

- ⇒ Pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas)
- ⇒ Medullary thyroid cancer
- ⇒ Acute kidney injury
- ⇒ Worsening diabetes-related retinopathy (progressive complication that can lead to blindness)



Are there any other benefits to using a GLP-1?

Aside from lowering blood sugar and weight loss, these medications have been shown to improve blood lipids and blood pressure, reduce the risk of heart and kidney disease, and delay the progress of diabetes-related kidney disease. However, more research is needed to prove these benefits exist for a large part of the population.

A Couple of Things to Know:

They are not a short-cut to weight loss. Research has shown that weight comes back on after stopping these medications.



There is not enough research about the long-term effects of these medications.



Be aware of WHERE these medications are coming from: they are available online from compounding pharmacies, but may not be the same as commercially prepared versions. They are not subject to oversight from the FDA or tested for safety and could contain other substances.

Resources: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1043661825004700>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/13901-glp-1-agonists>

Consumer-centered access for long-term care information, referrals and assessments.

For information, call 518-382-8481, #9, ext. 304

Do you have questions or concerns about what to eat?

If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County's Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible for a free consultation with Debbie Griswold, Registered Dietitian.

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 518-372-1622, ext. 269 to contact or leave a message.

Check out our website for nutrition resources: <http://ccschenectady.org/nutrition-for-seniors>

