

Medications for obesity

A guide to eating and living well while
taking medications for obesity



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Is this leaflet for me?

This leaflet is for adults who are using medications to manage obesity. It offers reliable tips for staying healthy while using these medications. It also provides tips for managing any side effects.

These medications may be used as a tool to help people manage their weight. They can also help people with type 2 diabetes control their blood sugar levels. These medications go by several names, such as GLP-1s, GLP-1 receptor agonists, weight loss medications, or incretin therapy. Their brand names include Mounjaro, Saxenda, and Wegovy.

In this leaflet, we call them **medications for obesity**. This does not include advice on other medications for obesity like Orlistat.

If you take these medications for type 2 diabetes, your dose will depend on your blood sugar levels. It is important that you speak to a dietitian and/or doctor for advice on the use of these medications. The diabetes medications may also go by a different name.



Talk to your doctor, healthcare team, or community pharmacist before starting medications for obesity. They will check if the medications for obesity are safe for you and if it affects other medicines, you may be taking.

If you make big changes to what you eat, or start new physical activities, talk to a doctor, nurse, or another health care professional first. If you want help choosing healthy foods or learning about portion sizes, speak to a registered dietitian.

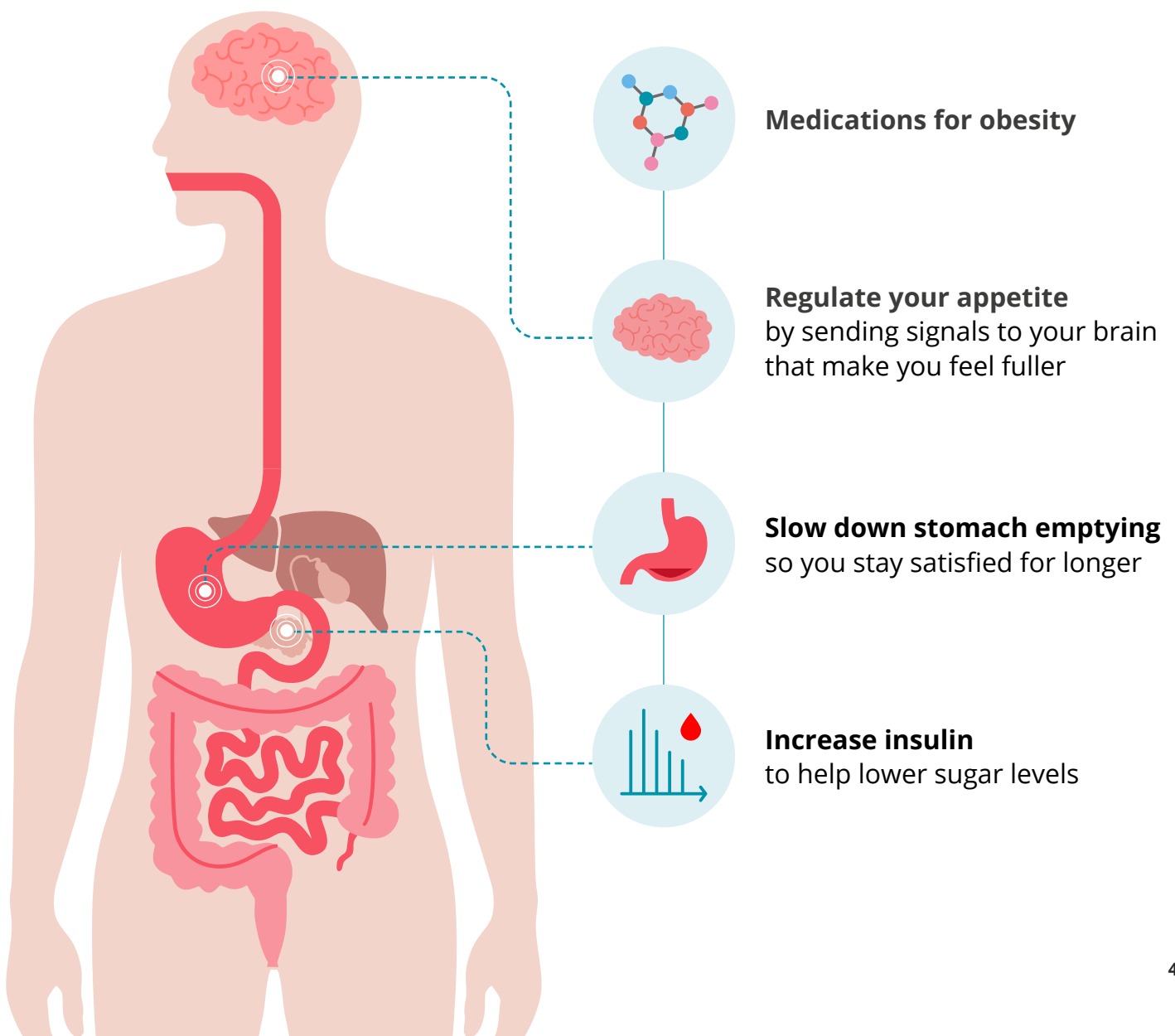


How medications for obesity work

Medications for obesity work by sending signals to your brain that act like a natural hormone that helps you feel full for longer. This helps reduce hunger and slows down food movement in your stomach. As a result, you feel full for longer.

These medications can also help manage blood sugar. They help release insulin when needed. They also lower sugar production in the liver.

Medications for obesity play a role in managing weight. They work best with healthy lifestyle habits to improve health. These medications are not a stand-alone solution or a quick way to lose weight for good. It is better to think about how you feel and how healthy you are, not just the number on the scales.



Important points to know



➔ **Other medications**

Talk to your doctor before using medications for obesity e.g. if you are taking medication for type 2 diabetes or your mental health.

➔ **Pregnancy**

Medications for obesity should not be used during pregnancy. Some medications for obesity can make a difference to how oral contraceptive pills (contraceptive tablets that are swallowed) are used by your body, so other safety steps may be needed. Speak to your doctor/prescriber about contraception before starting medications for obesity or if you decide you would like to become pregnant and are taking this medication.

➔ **Breastfeeding/HRT**

Talk to your doctor if you've had a baby recently or are breastfeeding and thinking about medications for obesity. Talk to your doctor if you are taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

➔ **Disordered eating**

Medications for obesity are not appropriate if your eating habits are disordered in any way. Disordered means that your eating habits are not good for your health. This includes binge eating or eating very little to lose weight. This is especially important if you have an eating disorder, such as anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder. It also matters if you're having treatment for one. Talk to your doctor or healthcare team if you're thinking about medications for obesity.

➔ **Surgery/anaesthetic**

If you are having surgery soon and will be given an anaesthetic (medication to help with surgery), tell your surgeon and anaesthetist about your medications for obesity. This is very important information for them to know about, as they may need you to stop using them for a short time. Tell the health professional at your pre-operation appointment.

➔ **Cancer/kidney/mental health treatment**

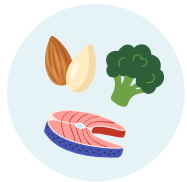
If you're starting or getting treatment for any of these, more information can be found at:

 bda.uk.com/OMM

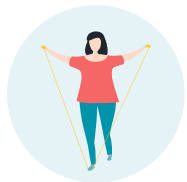
What is a healthy lifestyle?

A healthy lifestyle means looking after your body and mind. If you take medications for obesity, you could think about making changes that help to support your health every day. Try to keep doing these healthier habits every day.

Here are some simple ways to do this:



Eating a mix of healthy foods every day



Getting active by doing physically active hobbies, as well as strengthening activities



Staying hydrated



Getting enough sleep at night



Limiting recreational screen time on devices like phones, tablets, and TVs and have short breaks



Finding ways to keep calm and manage stress

See the web link or QR code at the end of this leaflet for lots of useful information to help you with making these changes.

Eating for health

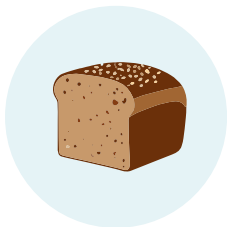
Medications for obesity can help you feel full. This means you may eat smaller meals than before. It's still important to eat and drink regularly to help your body get what it needs. Try to avoid long gaps between meals, even if your portions are smaller.

Eating lots of healthy foods and drinking plenty of water helps your body stay well. This leaflet will help you choose the right foods and drinks.

Eating less food can help you lose weight, but you can also lose muscle as well as body fat. If you don't eat enough protein or do enough physical activity, you could lose too much muscle. This can make your body weak, which is called sarcopenia. To keep your muscles strong, aim to eat protein with each meal and do some strength activities.



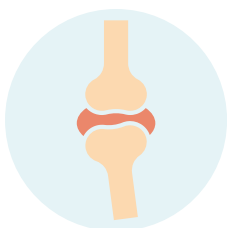
Add protein, carbohydrates, and some vegetables or fruit to your plate at every meal – see page 8.
If you are not very hungry, try using a smaller plate.



Choose foods that are high in fibre
These include wholegrain bread, brown rice, and wholewheat pasta. Fibre supports gut health and helps prevent constipation. Constipation can be a side effect of medications for obesity, so this is important.

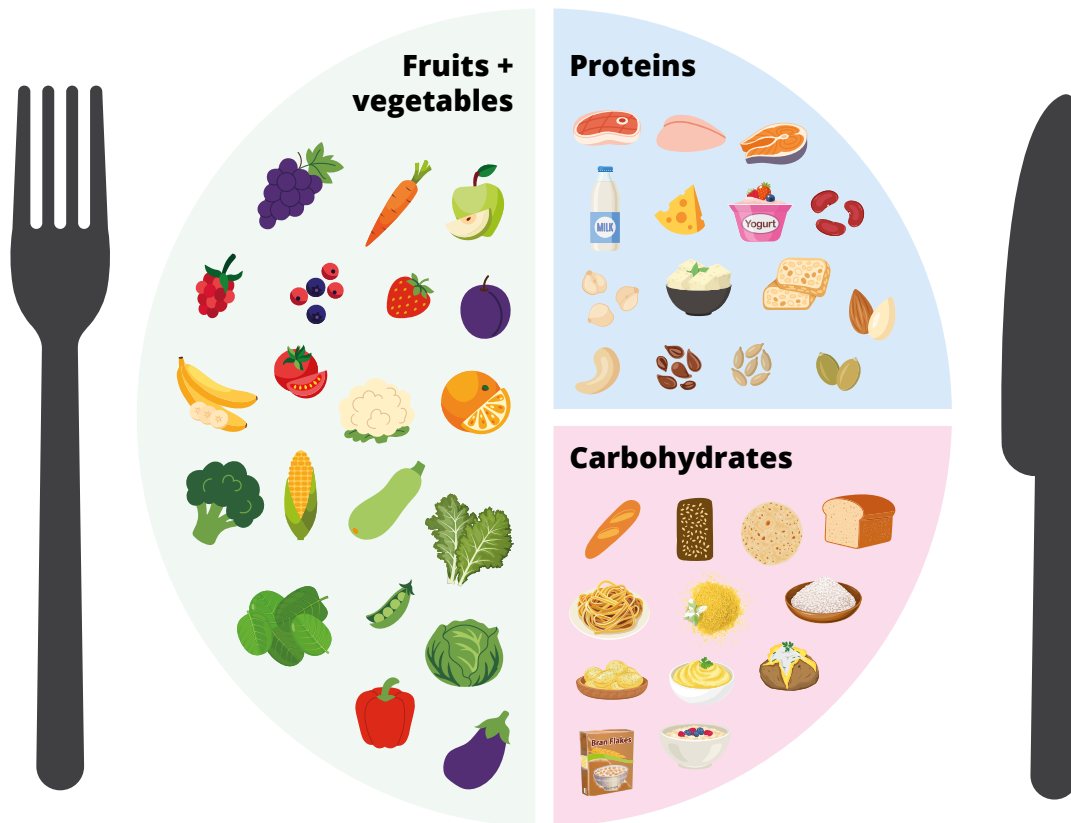


Drink plenty of fluids
Eating more fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts and seeds gives you more fibre, so don't forget to drink plenty of fluids to avoid constipation. Aim for 1.5 to 2 litres a day. Drink more if you are exercising or if it is a hot day.



Look after your bone health
Eat foods with calcium each day, like milk, yoghurt, tofu or cheese. You can choose reduced or lower low fat ones.

What a balanced meal should look like



Fats

Eating too many foods high in fat can make your cholesterol go up and can be bad for your heart. It's better to choose 'healthy' fats instead. You can find 'healthy' fats in:

- ✓ Avocado
- ✓ Olive oil, rapeseed oil
- ✓ Nuts (almonds, walnuts, cashews, hazelnuts)
- ✓ Seeds (chia, flax, sunflower, pumpkin)
- ✓ Oily fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines, trout)
- ✓ Nut butters (peanut/almond butter)
- ✓ Spreads made with healthy oils e.g. olive spread, rapeseed oil.

Fluids

Drinking enough is important for everyone, but when taking medications for obesity it is especially important to prevent constipation. If you are not feeling very hungry, it's better to drink separately from eating. Aim for 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid a day. Typically about 8 glasses.

Limit alcohol, sugary and high caffeine drinks if they worsen nausea, reflux or sleep.

Don't forget your food shopping might change if you are eating less. When eating out, you may like to order smaller meals if you feel like you can't eat big portions of food.

How much protein should I eat?

Some people want to know how much protein they need. Everyone has different protein needs. Try to have protein rich foods at your three meals each day. You do not need to weigh your food or use an online protein calculator. If you want to know exactly how much protein or other nutrients you need, talk to a registered dietitian.

To help you track your protein intake, and for menu ideas see the web link or QR code at the end of this leaflet. It will take you to many useful sites including the British Heart Foundation's protein guide webpage and menu ideas from the BDA.

Supplements

If you're eating less because you feel less hungry, your body may not get all the vitamins and minerals it needs. If you do not eat enough, you might feel dizzy, tired, lose hair, or have a low mood. If you spot these signs, please talk to your prescriber, doctor, registered dietitian, healthcare team, or community pharmacist. They can help you work out if you need to take additional vitamins or minerals. They can also check if there is another reason for your symptoms.



Food noise

It's normal to think about food. Hunger, routines, feelings, stress, and past experiences can all shape how we think about food. "Food noise" means having strong thoughts about food that go round in our minds.



Being aware of your thoughts

Sometimes, it might feel like you can't control these thoughts and find it hard to focus on anything else. When these thoughts happen too often and for too long, we may feel upset and stressed. Medications for obesity can help reduce or stop these thoughts.

After using medications for obesity for some time, or when you stop, these kind of thoughts might return. It is okay if these thoughts return. Some people find it helpful to stop and ask themselves whether something has made these thoughts come back. For example, could it be that you are feeling stressed, upset, or tired? Taking time to pause and ask yourself these questions can help you to understand how your feelings are linked to how you feel and what foods you eat.

Having this understanding can help you to make a plan and feel more ready when these thoughts come up. For example, when you notice food noise, you might like to pause and write down what has happened that day.

What may help

You could try focusing your attention on a different task, like playing your favourite song or watching a video. When eating, some people find it helpful to slow down and take their time to eat their meals more slowly. This helps them to notice the food they are eating and how it makes them feel.

Making sure that you are eating, drinking fluids, and moving on a regular basis could also help to make food noise less likely to come back. If you would like more information about mental health and food, see the useful weblink or QR code at the end.

Some people think medications for obesity change their appetite or how they view food. But this doesn't address the deeper reasons for those thoughts. If you are always thinking about food, you may need help and support. Losing weight or not feeling hungry can seem good, but it can hide bigger problems with disordered eating. This can make how you feel about food and your relationship with food worse over time.

Will I get side effects?

Many people taking medications for obesity can experience side effects.

You might:

- ➔ Feel sick
- ➔ Have constipation or diarrhoea
- ➔ Burp with a bad smell
- ➔ Have other gut problems

These symptoms are common when you start taking the medication or when your dose goes up.

Most side effects are mild to moderate. They usually improve as your body adjusts to the medication. These side effects can change weekly, especially after a weekly injection. There are other side effects not listed here. For more details, see the patient information leaflet that comes with your medications.

Easy ways to help your gut feel better:

- ➔ **Some foods and drinks can upset your gut.** These include spicy foods and high fat foods. If you notice that these foods are making you feel unwell, you could try and change how much of them you have or replace them with other foods
- ➔ **Limit or avoid** alcohol, sugary foods and drinks, and fizzy drinks like cola or lemonade
- ➔ **Try to have three small meals each day.** If a meal feels too big, start with eating the protein first
- ➔ **Eat and chew slowly.** This can help your gut feel better
- ➔ **Eating more fibre** is good for your gut
- ➔ **Drink lots of fluid every day.** Water, caffeine free or low sugar drinks are best



If you feel unwell, have side effects, are in pain, find it hard to eat, are vomiting, or have any worries about your medications for obesity, talk to your prescriber immediately. This could be a hospital doctor, a GP, a healthcare team, or a community pharmacist. You can ask them if your medication dose should be changed to help you feel better or if it needs to be stopped.

Other points about your medications for obesity:

How to take your medication

Your doctor or pharmacist will tell you how much medication to take, when to take it, and what to expect. It is important to always follow their advice because this can help you to stay healthy and safe when having medication. If you do not understand or are unsure about their advice, ask them to tell you in a different way or take a friend or family member to help you understand their advice.

If you're going on holiday

If you're going on holiday or have a special event soon, ask your doctor, healthcare team, or pharmacist for advice. They can help you make a plan, so you know what to do.



Movement and being active

Staying active can help manage your weight and help prevent you from regaining any lost weight. Try to make small changes to add more movement to your day.

For example, you could try walking to the shop and back or standing up and sitting down a few times. This is especially important if you tend to sit down for a long periods in the day (longer than an hour at a time). Sitting down for too long can, over time, make your joints and bones feel tight and achy. Some people find it helpful to set a timer to remind them to stand up and move. This might be a helpful way to build more movement into your day.

If you have trouble moving, try and take your time and go at your own pace.

People usually find it helpful to do something they really enjoy, like walking or dancing to their favourite songs. Every bit of movement helps, even if it is just a little bit at a time.

A good first goal could be to walk to the end of the garden or street and back. Then next week do that twice. The more you do movement and strengthening activities, the easier you will find it. Ask a friend to join you. It is more fun together.

Many people find it helpful to keep a chart or diary to keep track of their activity or how they feel. You can write down what you do, how much you walk or how you feel. If you have a mobile phone, you could always use your phone to make notes or use the step count. Keeping a record of your feelings and what you have done for the day can help you see your progress and feel proud of what you have achieved.

Strength activities: What they are and why they matter

Strength activities help make your muscles stronger. Muscles play an important role throughout our body, including vision, hearing, breathing, digestion and circulation, movement and posture.

Losing weight can mean you lose some muscle but eating a balanced diet, with adequate protein, and keeping active can help limit the amount of muscle you lose. Muscle loss means losing the muscles in your body. Doing some strength activities can help slow this down or stop it from happening.

Some people find strength activities hard. This can be because they are having pain, feel tired or have other health problems. If you feel like this, it is important that you speak to a healthcare professional, for example, your doctor.

Strong muscles help you stay healthy and make everyday tasks easier. Why not start by doing a little bit of strength activity each day? You could start with some chair based activities, like going from sitting to standing 8 times, resting and doing this again for a total of 5 minutes. You could then build up slowly to 10 minutes. It is easier if you do it often.

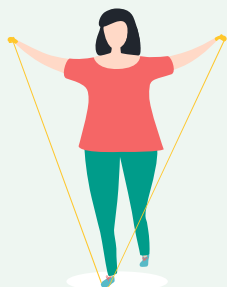
Some simple ways to do strengthening activities:

- ✓ Using stretchy bands (resistance bands) to pull or push with your arms or legs
- ✓ Doing simple moves while sitting down
- ✓ Squeezing a ball
- ✓ Lifting your legs
- ✓ Pushing your feet against the floor
- ✓ Pushing your body away from a wall using your hands
- ✓ Using dumbbells are great for strengthening. Not got dumbbells? Don't worry. At home you could use food tins, books or even a bottle of water

Simple moves while seated



Resistance bands



Wall pushes



Dumbbells



For easy exercise ideas, follow the web link or QR code at the end of this leaflet for links to some helpful websites.

Long-term healthier weight and lifestyle changes

Medications for obesity can help you eat less and lose weight. We know from the evidence that people need support to help limit regaining the weight they have lost when they stop medications for obesity. Regaining weight after stopping the medication is normal. Some people gain back a lot of the weight they lost within a year of stopping these medications. Knowing this helps us plan ways to slow the weight coming back and get the right support.

When using medications for obesity, it can be helpful to start building healthy habits for the long term. This is important because building habits alongside taking medications for obesity can help to manage weight if you stop taking the medication. Healthy habits can include your everyday eating patterns, activity levels and how you manage your feelings, like stress.



Setting goals

Setting clear, realistic and timed goals is important for making them doable. We know setting and meeting your goals can be hard, so understanding what helps or slows down your progress can help you to work out how best to deal with setbacks. You could keep a log of how you have overcome setbacks along the way. This can help you to plan ahead for any future roadblocks. For example, some people find it helpful to have a list of activities they enjoy doing indoors for when the weather is bad outside. This can help them to carry on making progress with their physical activity, especially on rainy days.

Getting further support

We know that long term goals aren't just about losing weight. You might want to get stronger, move more, play with your children or grandchildren, sleep better, and feel calmer. We have provided more information about how you might do these things in our additional behaviour change leaflet. We know that it can take time to build up healthy habits, and some people find it helpful to have support from a local programme or team that understands weight management. If you need more information on this, try asking your local healthcare provider, such as your doctor or pharmacist. For more information on behaviour change see our leaflet at:

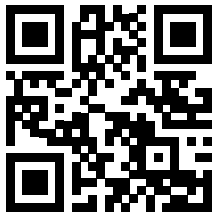
 bda.uk.com/OMM

Helpful webpages

We hope that you have found this leaflet and the information in it helpful. For helpful webpages to support your obesity management journey see:

 bda.uk.com/OMMInfo

or scan the QR code below



If you need to see a dietitian

Visit your GP for a referral or find a private dietitian. To check your dietitian is registered visit:

 hcpc-uk.org

About this publication

This leaflet is a publication of The British Dietetic Association (BDA) and is intended for information only. It is not a substitute for proper medical diagnosis or dietary advice given by a dietitian. This leaflet will be available to download free of charge from the BDA website.

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