

Weight Loss Medications

What are weight-loss medications?

Weight-loss medications are prescriptions that help people lose weight. They are usually only prescribed for people with a higher risk of medical problems due to their weight. One part of your risk is **body mass index (BMI)**. Body mass index describes your weight in comparison to your height. You may have a higher risk of health problems if you have a BMI of:

- 30 or higher
- 27 or higher AND have an obesity-related condition such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, or high cholesterol

How do weight-loss medications work?

There are two main types of weight-loss medication:

- 1 **Appetite suppressants** keep you from feeling hungry, or make you feel full.
- 2 **Lipase [LIE-pays] inhibitors** keep your body from taking in about one-third of the fat from the food you eat. The fat that your body does not take in passes out of your body as waste.
- 3 **Glucagon-like peptide 1 receptors** act like hormones in your body. They slow clearing of the stomach and make you feel full.

Weight-loss medications only work well when they are used as part of a program that includes healthy eating and regular physical activity. These activities will also be needed to help you keep the weight off after you stop taking the medication.



Some people who use weight-loss medications will lose more weight than others. The average amount of weight loss is 8 to 35 pounds over 12 months.

Are weight-loss medications safe?

The side effects from weight-loss medications are usually mild. In some cases, though, serious side effects have been reported. Your doctor will need to monitor your health and check for side effects for the first few weeks or months.

Doctors don't know a lot about the longer-term health effects of weight-loss medications. Talk with your doctor about your health, whether or not you think you will be able to make the necessary lifestyle changes, and the idea of taking these medications for a longer period of time.

The most common weight-loss medications are listed in the table on **pages 2 and 3**. Talk with your doctor about the pros and cons of each medication. This will help you decide if a weight-loss medication is a good option for you. Weight-loss medications are not usually covered by insurance, but you can use flex spending or health savings accounts (HSAs) to cover the costs.

Medication	Most common side effects	Cautions	Notes
Phentermine (Adipex) Appetite suppressant (makes you feel less hungry)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher blood pressure • Dizziness • Headache • Upset stomach • Trouble sleeping • Restlessness 	DO NOT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change your dose. • Use during pregnancy, or if you have uncontrolled high blood pressure, seizures, heart failure, or stroke. • Take with any other medications, including over-the-counter or herbal medications, unless your doctor says its okay. 	While using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check your blood pressure every week. • If you are female, take a pregnancy test every month.
Diethylpropion (Tenuate) Appetite suppressant (makes you feel less hungry)			
Orlistat (Xenical, Alli OTC) Lipase inhibitor (keeps your body from absorbing some fat)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diarrhea • Passing gas • Bloating • Abdominal pain • Upset stomach 	DO NOT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change your dose. • Use during pregnancy. • Take with any other medications, including over-the-counter or herbal medications, unless your doctor says its okay. 	While using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are female, take a pregnancy test every month. • Eat a balanced, reduced-calorie diet with about 30% of calories from fat. • Take a multivitamin containing fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, K) once a day, at least 2 hours before or after taking orlistat. • Ensure all your healthcare providers know you are taking this medication due to potential drug interactions.
Naltrexone-bupropion ER (Contrave) Opioid antagonist, anti-depressant (makes you feel less hungry and decreases food cravings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher blood pressure • Headache • Nausea • Vomiting • Constipation • Trouble sleeping 	DO NOT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use during pregnancy. • Use if you have a history of seizures or an eating disorders. • Use if you are on a chronic opioid medications or using bupropion for another indication. • Change your dose unless instructed by your healthcare provider 	While using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check your blood pressure every week. • If you are female, take a pregnancy test every month. • Alert your healthcare provider if you start having thoughts of suicide.
Phentermine topiramate ER (Qsymia) Appetite suppressant (makes you feel less hungry)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbness or tingling in the skin • Dizziness • Changed sense of taste • Insomnia • Constipation • Dry mouth 	DO NOT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change your dose. • Use during pregnancy. • Take with any other medications, including over-the-counter or herbal medications, unless your doctor says its okay. • Use if you have hyperthyroidism, glaucoma, or are taking medication for epilepsy, or certain medications for depression. 	While using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are female, take a pregnancy test every month. • Use 2 forms of birth control due to risk of harm to the developing fetus.

Continued on page 3.

Medication	Most common side effects	Cautions	Notes
<p>Liraglutide (Saxenda)</p> <p>Glucagon-like peptide 1 receptor agonist (slows the absorption of food to help you feel full earlier)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nausea • Vomiting • Diarrhea • Constipation • Increased heart rate • Headache • Injection site reaction 	<p>DO NOT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change your dose. • Use during pregnancy. • Use if you have a personal or family history of medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) or multiple endocrine neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN-2). 	<p>While using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alert your healthcare provider if you are experiencing severe side effects from the medication • Monitor your pulse (heart rate)
<p>Semaglutide (Wegovy)</p> <p>Glucagon-like peptide 1 receptor agonist (slows the absorption of food to help you feel full earlier)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stomach pain • Constipation • Diarrhea • Vomiting • Fatigue • Headache 	<p>DO NOT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change your dose. • Use during pregnancy. • Use if you have a personal or family history of medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) or multiple endocrine neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN-2). 	<p>While using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alert your healthcare provider if you are experiencing severe side effects from the medication • Monitor your pulse (heart rate)

Notes

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