



Understanding Side Effects of GLP-1 Medicines

GLP-1 medicines can cause side effects, especially when you first start or when your dose increases. Most side effects are mild, temporary, and manageable. This handout explains what to expect, what helps, and when to contact your care team.

Common Side Effects

Most side effects involve digestion.

You may notice:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Stomach pain, bloating, or gas
- Feeling full very quickly
- Heartburn, belching, or reflux

Some people also experience fatigue, headache, dizziness, or mild irritation at the injection site. These symptoms often improve within the first few weeks. You are not doing anything wrong.

Feeling Full vs. Nausea

GLP-1 medicines help you feel full sooner and for longer. This is expected and means the medication is working.

Nausea is different—it feels unpleasant or queasy and needs attention.



Feeling satisfied after a smaller meal? Normal



Feeling sick or uncomfortable?
Use the tips here and let your care team know

WHAT HELPS: EATING & DRINKING

How you eat can make a big difference:

- ✓ **Eat smaller meals** more often (every 3–4 hours)
- ✓ **Eat slowly** and stop when comfortably full
- ✓ **Avoid** greasy, fried, or spicy foods
- ✓ **Limit** sugary foods, alcohol, and carbonated drinks
- ✓ **Drink fluids** throughout the day—hydration matters
- ✓ **Don't skip breakfast**; a small, bland meal can reduce nausea
- ✓ **Some medications require specific timing** with food and fluids to be absorbed properly—follow your clinician's and medication instructions.



Very Low Appetite or Nausea Days

These days are common during dose changes. Focus on gentle nourishment, not perfect meals.

Helpful strategies:



Constipation

- Increase fiber gradually (fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains)
- Drink more water
- Stay active—daily walking helps
- Ask your care team about a stool softener if needed



Dose Adjustments

Your provider starts low and increases slowly to reduce side effects.

- If symptoms are bothersome, let your provider know before increasing
- Staying at the same dose longer is often helpful
- The right dose is the one that works for you—not necessarily the highest dose
- Do not change your dose or stop the medication without guidance.



LESS COMMON BUT IMPORTANT

Contact your care team right away if you notice:

- ✓ **Severe or ongoing abdominal pain**, especially in the upper right abdomen
- ✓ **Signs of dehydration** (dizziness, low urine output)
- ✓ **Low blood sugar symptoms** (shakiness, sweating, confusion), especially if you use insulin or sulfonylureas
- ✓ **Vision changes** if you have diabetes
- ✓ **Severe abdominal pain** spreading to the back (possible pancreatitis—rare)



Always tell healthcare providers you take a GLP-1 medicine before surgery or anesthesia.



Who Should Not Take GLP-1 Medicines

These medicines may not be right for everyone. Tell your provider if you have:

- A personal or family history of medullary thyroid cancer
- MEN-2 syndrome
- A serious allergic reaction to GLP-1 medicines
- Also share any history of pancreatitis, gallbladder disease, stomach surgery, kidney or liver disease, or pregnancy plans.

Final Reminder

Most side effects improve with time and support. GLP-1 medicines have strong evidence for benefits to blood sugar, weight, and heart health. Your care team is here to help—reach out anytime with concerns.



This handout is for education only and does not replace medical advice.