

GLP-1 Agonists



How do they work?



After eating, your body produces a hormone called 'Glucagon-like Peptide 1' (GLP-1). This hormone sends signals to the brain and stomach to make you feel full.

GLP-1 agonists are a group of medications that copy the action of the hormone GLP-1.

They work slowly around the day to make you feel less hungry. GLP-1 agonists will alter your appetite and you will feel full more quickly after having a meal or a snack, which will result in weight loss and helps your own body's insulin work better.

GLP-1 agonists are useful for people either living with type 2 diabetes, wanting to lose weight or both.

What are the benefits?

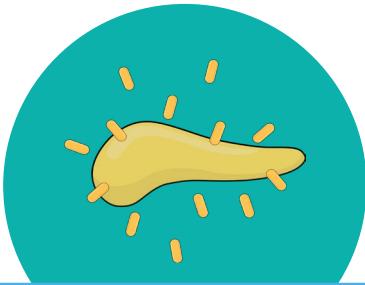


GLP-1 agonists can:

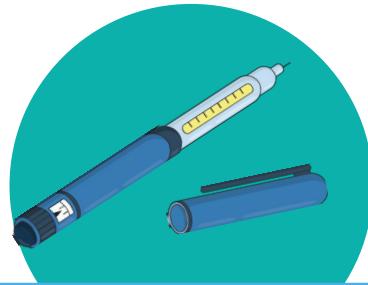
Make you feel less hungry and feel more full after meals and snacks.



Help you reduce your body weight.



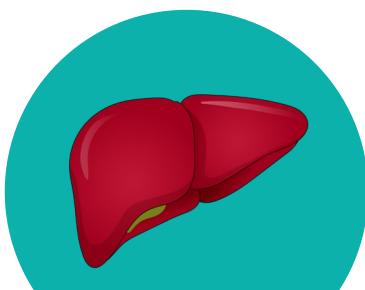
Help your own body's insulin work better.



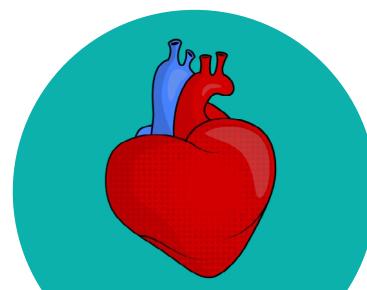
If you are taking insulin, it can help reduce the daily doses of insulin that you need to inject.

Support your blood glucose levels to be within range.

There is also some evidence that they can:



Reverse early signs of fatty liver disease.



Prevent the development of heart disease.

What form does the medication come in?

There are different types of GLP-1 agonists available. You will recognise them by their names, which all end in '-tide'. Your healthcare team might refer to them as their brand names.

Liraglutide

Dulaglutide

Semaglutide

These come as pre-filled injection pens.

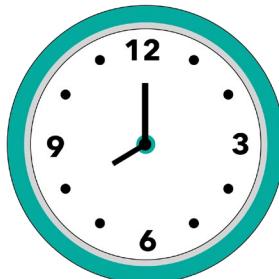
You will most likely start at the lowest dose and keep increasing it as tolerated to the maximum dose. Always check that the brand you receive from your pharmacy is the one you were expecting and at the right dose.

Missed Doses

If you miss a dose, do not double up on the next dose. Each medication varies so refer to the specific medication advice leaflet for more information about when to take your next dose.

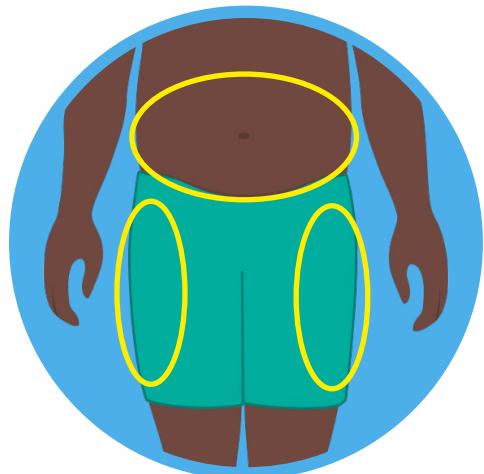
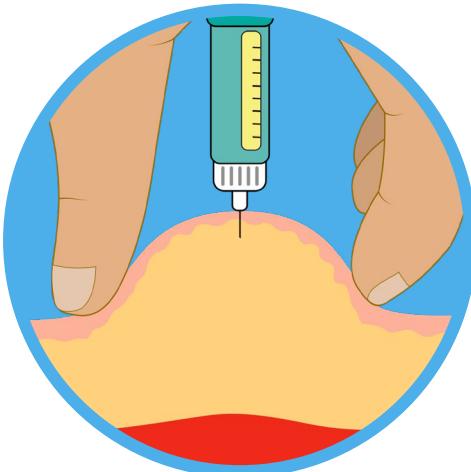
Time of Injection

GLP-1 agonists do not need to be given with meals.



For once-weekly injections, it's helpful to pick a day and time that is easy to remember, and then give the injection on the same day each week. For daily injections, aim for a similar time each day.

Injection Sites



The medication needs to be injected into the layer of fat just under your skin.

The best injection sites are your:

- Tummy (at least 5 cm away from your belly button)
- Thighs (at the side)

Make sure you use a new needle and choose a different place to inject into each time. Do not inject into the same place twice in a row. This is called 'injection site rotation' and ensures your medication gets absorbed properly.

Storage

Unopened pens should be stored in a refrigerator. Once opened, keep the pen in a refrigerator or at room temperature for up to the time stated on the medication sheet or packaging.

It can be useful to keep the pen in a place that reminds you to give the injection every week.

How should I dispose of used equipment?



You will receive a regular supply of pens from your pharmacy or hospital with each prescription.

You will be given a sharps bin when you start treatment, and replacement bins when needed.

Ask your healthcare team about what to do when your sharps bins are full.

Can they cause hypos (low blood glucose)?



No. GLP-1 agonists alone don't carry this risk.



If you are on a combination of a GLP-1 agonist plus insulin, you might get hypos, which is why regular blood glucose check is important in this case.

Are There Any Risks or Side Effects?

GLP-1 agonists are well tolerated by most young people. However, as with all medications, there are some potential side effects, including:



Stomach-ache.

Diarrhoea (going to the toilet often and having loose or watery poo).

Nausea (feeling sick)

Vomiting (being sick)

Heartburn (acid reflux)

Fatigue (feeling tired)

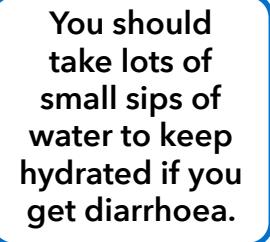


These side effects are common when you first start taking the medication, but they tend to settle down after a few weeks.

To help ease these side effects, we recommend that you follow the advice below as you start the medication:

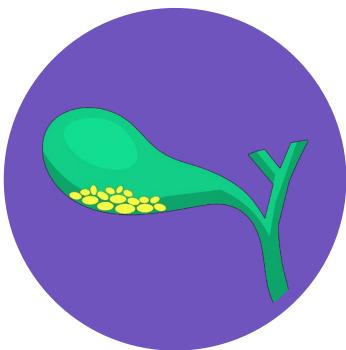


Increase your dose of GLP-1 agonist slowly (according to advice from your healthcare team) to allow your body time to adapt to the medication.



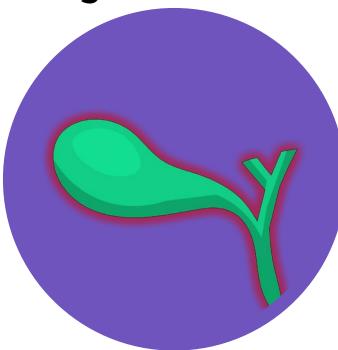
There are also a few rare side effects of GLP-1 agonists, including:

Gallstones

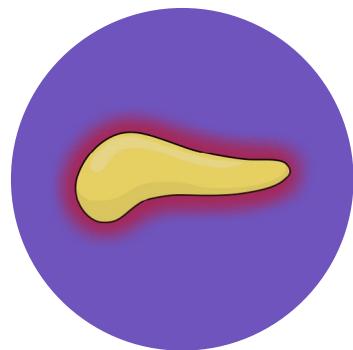


Small stones, usually made of cholesterol, that form in the gallbladder.

Inflammation of the gallbladder.



Acute pancreatitis



A condition where the pancreas becomes swollen over a short period of time.

Your healthcare team will assess your own risks before you start taking the medication.



If after starting the medication you experience a strong tummy pain that won't go away, you should stop the GLP-1 agonist and contact your healthcare team for advice. If your symptoms are severe, go to your nearest emergency department or call 111 for advice straight away.

Sick Day Rules

If you need to take your next dose and you are feeling very unwell, for example, if you:

Have a high temperature (above 38.5°C)

Have severe and frequent diarrhoea or vomiting

Have a severe infection that needs antibiotic treatment

Are dehydrated

(signs of this include being really thirsty, a dry mouth, going to the toilet less than four times a day, or dark yellow urine.)

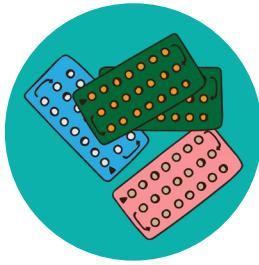
You should skip the next dose and speak with your healthcare team for advice.

Contraception and GLP-1 Agonists

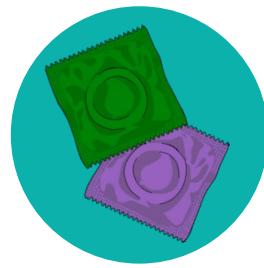
The effects of GLP-1s on an unborn baby are unknown. If you are sexually active, we advise that you use suitable contraception to prevent pregnancy.



If you think you might be pregnant or are planning a pregnancy, you should contact your healthcare team as soon as possible as you may need to stop or change your medication.



Some GLP-1s, for example mounjaro (tirzepatide), are known to reduce the effectiveness of your oral contraceptive, so you will need to use a barrier method of contraception as well.



Whatever medication you are on, you should always read your medication leaflet carefully.

Operations or procedures needing anesthetic

If you are having an operation or a general anaesthetic (medicines that are used to send you to sleep during an operation), you should let your healthcare team know in advance in case you need to stop taking your medication.

You should also let the anesthetist know you are taking GLP-1 agonists.