

GLP-1s and Lifestyle - What I Need to Know

GLP-1 medications mimic the action of naturally occurring hormones, to help reduce hunger. This can have benefits for weight management and general health. These medications are becoming more and more popular, but they work best when combined with a healthy lifestyle. The recommendations provided below can help you to maximise your chances of success.

Prioritise protein

Target: Build your meals around at least 30g of protein.

GLP-1 medications can reduce appetite significantly. This makes it essential to include plenty of protein in your meals when you do eat, to help preserve your muscle mass.

Good protein sources include:

- Meat (e.g., chicken, turkey, beef, pork or lamb).
- Fish: white (e.g., cod, haddock or pollock) or oily (e.g., salmon, sardines or mackerel).
- Eggs (e.g., boiled, scrambled, poached or fried).
- Dairy (e.g., cheese or Greek yogurt).
- Plant-based options, such as lentils, tofu, tempeh, Quorn™ and some protein powders.

Regular resistance exercise

Strength training will help to maintain muscle mass and boost your metabolism. Some simple exercises you can try at home are listed below:

- Upper body exercises include push-ups, triceps dips, and rows (e.g., with resistance bands, or using household items for weights).
- Lower body exercises include bodyweight squats, lunges (forward or reverse), calf raises, and glute bridges.
- Core exercises include planks, crunches, and "dead bugs".

You can find out how to do these exercises online (e.g., at www.youtube.com), and most of them can be modified to make them easier (or harder), as necessary.

Aim to complete some resistance exercise at least twice each week.

Have fewer ultra-processed foods

Focus on eating whole, minimally processed foods to support your health goals.

Avoid or limit:

- Packaged snacks (e.g., crisps and biscuits).
- Sugary drinks.
- Highly processed meats.
 - Ready meals.
 - Fast food.
- Sweets and chocolate.

Instead choose:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Wholegrains (e.g., brown rice, quinoa and oats).
- Good sources of protein (see above).
 - Nuts and seeds.
 - Plain yogurt.
- Home-cooked meals.

Managing nausea

Nausea is common when starting GLP-1 medications. If you experience this, the following eating strategies can help:

- Eat smaller, more frequent meals.
- Eat slowly and chew thoroughly.
- Stop eating as soon as you feel comfortably full.
- Avoid lying down straight after meals.
- Have small, frequent sips of water.
- Choose easy-to-digest foods.
- Try ginger or peppermint tea.
- Avoid very fatty, greasy or spicy food.

Contact your healthcare provider if you experience any of the following:

- Persistent vomiting.
- Inability to keep fluids down.
- Severe pain in your stomach.
- Signs of dehydration.
- Nausea that interferes with daily activities.

More quick tips:

- Prepare protein-rich meal options in advance, to make sure you have something available when you need it.
- Keep a food diary to track protein intake, to help ensure you are getting enough.
- Track your progress towards your goals, and any side-effects you might be experiencing.
- Start resistance exercises gradually and build up slowly.
- Stay consistent with both medication timing and lifestyle changes.
- Talk to your healthcare team if you have any concerns.

Remember, these lifestyle changes will work alongside your GLP-1 medication to help you achieve and maintain your health goals. Consistency is key to long-term success though, so it is important to pick options you think you will be able to stick to.

Any questions? Contact your healthcare provider or pharmacist for personalised advice.

This information is for educational purposes only and does not replace professional medical advice. Always consult your healthcare provider before making significant changes to your diet or exercise routine.

The role of lifestyle in managing and improving health is explored further on X-PERT programmes and in X-PERT Handbooks.
For more information, visit www.xperthealth.org.uk.