

Could weight loss medication help you?



Doctors and healthcare providers may advise their patients to consider prescription medications to help lose weight and keep it off long-term. In making a specific recommendation, they will consider the factors listed below, in addition to other factors.

Weight history

- Did problems with overweight begin at a young age?
- Has the individual frequently lost and regained weight (called weight cycling)?
- Have previous attempts to lose weight focused on only behavior change (eating less and/or exercising more)?

Current health status

- What is the overall health status of the individual, including mental health?
- What medications is the individual currently taking?
- Does the individual have one or more weight-related health conditions, such as prediabetes or type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease or sleep apnea?
- Is losing only five percent of body weight unlikely to improve the individual's health?
- Is the individual's health at high risk of getting worse if weight is gained or regained?

Current Body Mass Index (BMI)

- Is BMI 30.0 or higher?
- Is BMI between 27.0 and 29.9 and at least one weight-related medical condition is present?

Doctors and healthcare providers will not recommend weight loss medications for women who are pregnant, trying to become pregnant or breastfeeding or for people who have an eating disorder, mental health issues or certain other conditions.

It is important to understand the risks, benefits and limitations associated with any medications, including medications for weight loss. In some people, they may cause side effects that make them unpleasant to take. Also, they may not be covered by certain health plans or health spending accounts, so out-of-pocket costs may need to be considered.

The decision to begin and continue medications for weight loss and weight maintenance is up to the individual. Everyone has the right to refuse medications for weight loss, if desired. Having realistic expectations and goals for weight loss are important. Individuals taking medications for weight loss should comply with all required follow-up healthcare visits for monitoring, follow-up assessments and referrals, as needed.



Activity: “Pros” and “cons” for taking weight loss medications

Use the table below to list the “pros” (benefits) and “cons” (disadvantages) of any weight loss medications you are interested in. Your doctor or healthcare provider can help you determine the option that is best for you based on your personal circumstances, preferences and medical history. If you decide to take one of these medications, be sure to read the patient information package insert.

Medication name	“Pros” (Benefits)	“Cons” (Disadvantages)

More aggressive treatments: Surgery for weight loss

For people who try a medicine for weight loss and it does not work or they are bothered by side effects, their doctor or healthcare provider may suggest trying a different medicine or combination of medicines. Surgery for weight loss may also be an option for some people. Bariatric (weight loss) surgery may be an option for people with a BMI of 40.0 or more (45 kilograms or 100 pounds or more overweight) or for people with a BMI of 30.0 or more, significant obesity-related health complications or disease and a history of failure with other weight loss methods. Surgery as a treatment for obesity is performed by doctors specializing in bariatric medicine. The aim of surgery is to modify the gastrointestinal tract to reduce the amount of food eaten, the amount of nutrients absorbed or both.

Several surgical procedures are available that typically produce weight losses of 25 to 35 percent of current weight. Weight loss is usually well maintained and is associated with major improvements in health-related complications of overweight. Most people experience substantial improvements in control of blood glucose and blood pressure, sleep apnea and mobility.

Like all treatments for obesity, surgery requires long-term follow-up. Patients need help to adjust to the surgery and adopt healthy eating and activity habits. Surgery is not an alternative to eating healthfully. After surgery, most people can eat a variety of foods, but they must eat smaller quantities and may need to take vitamin supplements. After the surgery and initial weight loss, preventing weight gain is a challenge. Because complications are potentially very serious, candidates for bariatric surgery should be fully aware of the benefits and risks before undergoing these types of procedures.



A multidisciplinary approach for weight management¹

The American Heart Association, American College of Cardiology and The Obesity Society have published guidelines for managing overweight and obesity in adults. Their recommendations were based on a thorough and careful review of the very latest, highest-quality clinical trial research. According to the recommendations, managing obesity requires a multidisciplinary approach involving the collaboration of different healthcare professionals, such as medical, nutrition and behavioral experts. This approach also highlights a key aspect of managing chronic diseases: the importance of pairing a dedicated patient with knowledgeable healthcare providers to successfully address long-term conditions such as obesity and its related cardiovascular risks.

These expert recommendations also explain that the rationale for use of medications is to help people adhere to a lower-calorie diet more consistently in order to achieve sufficient weight loss and health improvements when combined with increased physical activity. Medications work to reinforce lifestyle change and should be prescribed together with, not in place of, a lifestyle management program.



References:

1. Jensen, Michael D., et al. "2013 AHA/ACC/TOS Guideline for the Management of Overweight and Obesity in Adults: A Report of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Task Force on Practice Guidelines and The Obesity Society." *Circulation*, vol. 129, no. 25_suppl_2, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1161/01.cir.0000437739.71477.ee>.

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