

Prescription Weight Loss Drugs

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

The prescription weight loss drug semaglutide, sold with different brand names, has been making headline news for a few reasons. These medications are newsworthy because they provide striking weight reduction in a short time. But they can also have side effects, high cost, and cause drug shortages. Do the benefits of taking semaglutide outweigh the risks?

Semaglutide is an injectable medication that was developed for people with type 2 diabetes to help with blood sugar control. It's injected by the user once a week, on the same day. Since a noted side effect of semaglutide is weight loss, the drug became popular, especially in Hollywood, for the sometimes off-label use of weight control.

Unfortunately, its popularity as a weight loss aid has caused drug shortages for people who need it to control their diabetes, and shortages are not expected to resolve anytime soon.

These drugs may not be covered by health insurance plans, especially for an off-label use. Since they need to be taken long-term, they are costly without a drug plan. Studies have shown that people who stop taking semaglutide will regain the weight they have lost, so it's a true lifetime commitment.

While there is no doubt that semaglutide reduces appetite and aids weight loss, it may also cause troubling side effects in some people, including:

- Nausea.
- Vomiting.
- Diarrhea.
- Heartburn.
- Headache.
- Low blood sugar.
- Loss of facial fat (gaunt appearance).

Check with your health care provider before making any decisions about taking semaglutide. Remember to weigh the cost, side effects, commitment and worrisome drug shortages with the outcome of weight loss while you make your decision.



Beyond Counting Calories

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Calorie counting is popular weight loss advice. The concept seems simple: Eat fewer calories and burn more through exercise, and you'll shed unwanted pounds. Yes, calories are important. However, the landscape of human metabolism and nutrition is more complex than this, and calories are just one small piece of the puzzle.

Many factors beyond calorie intake can affect your weight status, including:

- ↻ Health conditions.
- ↻ Genetics.
- ↻ Hormones.
- ↻ Environment.
- ↻ Food availability.
- ↻ Stress.
- ↻ Physical activity.
- ↻ Sleep.
- ↻ Socioeconomic status.



A simplistic “calories in, calories out” approach fails to address these variables. Your health provider needs to take all these factors into account if you want to lose weight.

Focusing solely on counting calories doesn't account for the quality of the food. Not all calories are created equal. For example, a 100-calorie apple affects your body differently than a 100-calorie cookie. The apple provides fiber, vitamin C and a feeling of satiety, while the cookie offers mostly sugar and refined flour. Eating mostly calories from foods that contain little nutritional value can lead to nutrient deficiencies.

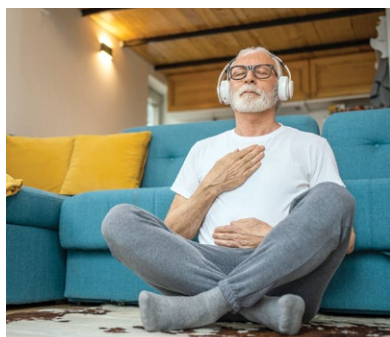
For some, counting calories becomes tedious and starts to erode the pleasure of food. If you start to see everything as numbers, you lose sight of the enjoyable taste, scent and texture of food. This can lead to disordered eating habits and an unhealthy relationship with food.

A mindful eating practice, where you learn how to feel your hunger and fullness cues, is a preferred approach. You can work with a dietitian or therapist to learn more. Calorie counting can be a useful tool in weight management but is not sufficient on its own. Sustainable weight loss requires a multifaceted approach.

Q: Health effects of chronic worry?

A: Worries are thoughts about bad things that might happen in the future and doubts about how well we will be able to cope. Worries sometimes involve past events, but the true source of anxiety is usually about how these events might affect us in the future.

These anxiety-provoking thoughts can trigger a release of stress hormones, raise our heart rates, cause us to tense our muscles and lead to more rapid, shallow breathing. Potential long-term effects include:



- ➔ Headaches, backaches or other chronic pain.
- ➔ Panic attacks.
- ➔ High blood pressure or heart disease.
- ➔ Impaired immunity.
- ➔ Depression.
- ➔ Chronic fatigue.
- ➔ Heartburn or acid reflux.
- ➔ Sexual or reproductive dysfunction.

Fortunately, there are various techniques that can help us control our worry and stress levels. Self-help approaches, such as deep breathing or meditation, can be very calming, and professional help is available as well. — Eric Endlich, PhD

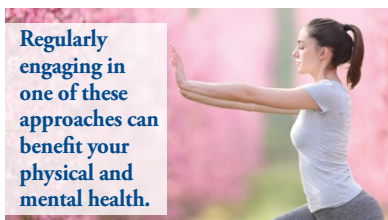
Lessons in Relaxation

It's not possible to eliminate all of the stress from your life — and even if you could, life might become rather boring. But if constant stress is causing you a great deal of anxiety or muscle tension, you may want to explore some of the many well-established relaxation techniques, such as:

Deep breathing: Inhale slowly, and try to inflate your belly more than your chest. Exhale gradually, and continue this pattern for several minutes; consider repeating a soothing word, such as peace or relax, in your mind (or a phrase from a favorite prayer) as you breathe out.

Progressive muscle relaxation: Focus on a set of muscles, such as your thighs, tense them for five to ten seconds (this part is optional), relax them and move on to another area.

Mindfulness meditation: This involves taking a few minutes to tune in to your thoughts and sensations, accepting them without judgment. A body scan where you mentally notice the level of tension from head to toe is another variation on this approach.



Visualization or guided imagery:

Sitting in a comfortable position, take a mental journey to a favorite place (real or imaginary), including as many sensory details as possible.

Movement-based approaches: These include tai chi, yoga and nature walks. Rhythmic, repetitive, physical activity also can help you relax: swimming, walking, rowing, running and dancing.

Ease the Burden on Your Shoulders

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Your shoulders are the most movable joints in your body. This movement allows you to easily make overhead arm movements. All of this mobility comes at a cost, since shoulder joints, muscles and ligaments are susceptible to wear and tear or injury.



Common types of shoulder injuries:

- ✓ Tendinitis occurs when the shoulder tendons become worn or inflamed.
- ✓ Bursitis is an irritation of the bursa sac that protects the shoulder.
- ✓ Impingement can happen from excessive rubbing of the rotator cuff on nearby bones.
- ✓ Rotator cuff tears may result from overuse or aging.
- ✓ Frozen shoulder causes reduced joint motion.
- ✓ Dislocation results when the joint's ball moves out of its socket.

Many of the problems are preventable. These tips can ease the burden and help keep your shoulders healthy:

- 1. Practice good posture.** Keep your shoulders back and your head positioned over your shoulders. While sleeping, rest on your side or back, not on your stomach.
- 2. Lift and carry properly.** Hold the objects close to your body. Do not lift heavy loads with outstretched arms. While reaching with your arms, keep your thumbs facing upward.
- 3. Reduce shoulder strain.** Do not carry a purse or pack over just one shoulder. Use a stool or ladder instead of working with your arms above shoulder level for long periods. Avoid repetitive movements without taking frequent breaks.
- 4. Maintain strength and flexibility.** After first warming up, do exercises to strengthen your shoulder muscles two to three times a week. Also, stretch your shoulder muscles several times a week. Talk to a physical therapist or exercise trainer for help designing a shoulder exercise program.



The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, **Indulge in Time for You**, is at personalbest.com/extras/24V8tools.

8.2024