GLP-1 medicines can support weight management and help manage type 2 diabetes, but gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms are common—especially when treatment starts or the dose increases. Nausea, constipation, diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal discomfort can range from mildly annoying to serious enough to need medical attention.

If your symptoms feel severe, keep returning, or make it hard to drink and eat, do not simply try to push through. Contact your prescriber for advice. They may recommend practical changes, closer monitoring, a pause in dose increases, or a different treatment plan. This guide explains why GI symptoms happen, what may help, what the research tells us, and when to seek urgent care.

How GLP-1 medicines work

GLP-1 receptor agonists act on pathways involved in blood sugar regulation, appetite, and digestion. They can increase feelings of fullness, reduce appetite, and slow the movement of food out of the stomach. These effects can help people eat less and, for some medicines, improve blood glucose control.



Examples include semaglutide, which is sold under brand names including Ozempic and Wegovy. Different products can have different approved uses and dosing schedules. A brand name or ingredient alone does not tell you whether a particular product is appropriate for you; follow the instructions for the medicine prescribed to you.

Slower stomach emptying and changes in appetite can contribute to GI symptoms. Symptoms often appear during the early weeks of treatment or after a dose increase, when the body is adjusting. Some people find that symptoms settle over time, but persistent or severe symptoms should not be assumed to be harmless.

What GI symptoms can happen?

Commonly reported symptoms include:

- Nausea or feeling overly full
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Constipation

- Abdominal pain or discomfort
- Bloating, indigestion, or burping

Symptoms vary from person to person. They may affect appetite, sleep, exercise, work, and your ability to stay hydrated. If you are vomiting repeatedly, cannot keep fluids down, or feel weak or light-headed, contact a healthcare professional promptly.

What the research says about GI side effects

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) have found that GI symptoms are among the most commonly reported side effects of GLP-1 receptor agonists. In the STEP clinical trial program, which studied semaglutide for weight management in adults with overweight or obesity, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, and constipation were reported by some participants. Symptoms were generally more common during dose escalation, and some participants stopped treatment because of side effects.

Trial results describe groups of participants, not what will happen to an individual. They also come from a supervised research setting, so they cannot replace advice from your own prescriber. The likelihood and impact of symptoms can depend on the medicine, dose, rate of increase, health history, and other medications.

RCTs and clinical guidance support gradual dose escalation for relevant medicines, partly to improve tolerability. That does not mean you should change your dose on your own. A prescriber should guide any dose adjustment, delay, or interruption based on your symptoms and treatment plan.

What to do if you have bad GI symptoms

Start with how severe the symptoms are

If symptoms are mild, short-lived, and you can drink fluids, simple changes may help while you monitor how you feel. If symptoms are severe, persistent, worsening, or interfering with daily life, contact your prescriber rather than waiting for your next routine appointment.

Seek urgent medical help for severe or persistent abdominal pain, especially if it spreads to your back or occurs with vomiting; repeated vomiting or inability to keep fluids down; signs of dehydration; fainting or confusion; or severe allergic symptoms such as trouble breathing or swelling of the face or throat. These symptoms can have different causes and need prompt assessment. If you think it is an emergency, use your local emergency service.



Try practical nausea management

For mild nausea, some people find the following measures helpful:

- Eat smaller meals and stop when comfortably full.
- Eat slowly and avoid lying down immediately after a meal.
- Choose simple, lower-fat foods if rich or greasy meals make symptoms worse.
- Sip fluids regularly. If vomiting or diarrhea is causing fluid loss, ask a healthcare professional whether an oral rehydration solution is appropriate for you.
- Keep a brief record of symptoms, meals, fluid intake, and injection dates to discuss with your care team.

These are general comfort measures, not a substitute for medical advice. Do not take over-the-counter medicines, supplements, or remedies for ongoing symptoms without checking whether they are suitable for you, particularly if you have other health conditions or take other medicines.

Contact your prescriber about dose adjustment

If symptoms started after a dose increase or are not settling, contact your prescriber before taking the next step in your schedule. Depending on your situation, they may advise staying at the current dose longer, delaying an increase, changing the plan, or stopping treatment. This is individualized care—not a decision to make based on someone else's experience online.

Do not take extra doses, make up a missed dose in a way that differs from your product instructions, or restart after a break without checking the prescribing guidance or asking your clinician or pharmacist. Instructions can vary by product and by how long you have been off treatment.

NICE guidance and eligibility in the UK

In the UK, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) publishes recommendations for certain medicines and uses. Eligibility is not simply a matter of wanting to lose weight or having a particular number on the scale. It can depend on the specific medicine, its licensed indication, body mass index (BMI), weight-related health conditions, previous treatment, and the service or pathway in which care is provided.

For example, NICE recommendations for semaglutide for weight management have included use within specialist weight-management services and specific eligibility and stopping criteria. Recommendations can change, and the rules for a medicine used for weight management may differ from those for a medicine used to treat type 2 diabetes. Check current NICE guidance and discuss your eligibility with an NHS clinician or prescriber. A recommendation does not mean a medicine is suitable for everyone, and access may vary across the UK.

If you live outside the UK, NICE guidance may not apply to your local prescribing rules. Follow the advice of a qualified clinician in your area.

Monitoring and follow-up

Good monitoring helps your care team weigh the benefits of treatment against side effects. Your prescriber may ask about symptom timing and severity, changes in eating and drinking, bowel habits, weight, blood glucose if relevant, and other medicines. Depending on your health and treatment, they may also review hydration, nutritional intake, and any warning signs that need further investigation.

What to monitor What to note When to share it GI symptoms Type, severity, duration, and whether symptoms followed a dose change Contact your prescriber if symptoms persist, worsen, or disrupt daily life Fluids and food Whether you can drink and eat enough; vomiting or diarrhea Seek prompt advice if you cannot keep fluids down or may be dehydrated Other medicines and health changes New medicines, supplements, or changes in a relevant health condition Tell your prescriber or pharmacist before changing treatment

Monitoring is particularly important if you take other medicines that affect blood sugar or digestion, or if you have a condition that could make dehydration or poor food intake more concerning. Your clinician can advise what matters for your individual circumstances.

Be careful with online sources and products

Online marketplaces and social media channels may feature unverified claims, dosing advice, or products advertised as alternatives to prescribed GLP-1 medicines. A post or testimonial **Click here to find out more** cannot confirm that a product is genuine, suitable, or safe for you. Do not buy prescription medicines from unverified sellers or follow dose instructions from influencers or strangers.

Use a legitimate, regulated pharmacy and obtain treatment through an appropriate prescriber. If you are unsure whether a product is genuine or whether advice you received is safe, ask a pharmacist or clinician before using it.

How to prepare for a conversation with your prescriber

Clear information helps your care team give useful advice. Before you call or attend an appointment, consider writing down:

- The medicine name, dose, and date of your most recent dose or dose increase
- When symptoms started and whether they are improving or worsening
- How often you have vomited or had diarrhea, and whether you can keep fluids down
- Other medicines, supplements, or significant health changes
- Any severe pain, dizziness, reduced urination, or other concerning symptoms

Ask directly what to do about your next dose, whether you need an assessment, and what symptoms should trigger urgent care. If you cannot reach your usual prescriber and your symptoms are concerning, contact an

appropriate urgent-care service or pharmacist for guidance.

The bottom line

GI symptoms are common with GLP-1 receptor agonists, particularly during dose escalation, but severe or persistent symptoms deserve attention. Small meals, slower eating, and regular fluid intake may help with mild nausea, while dose changes should be discussed with your prescriber. Keep track of symptoms, use medicines only through legitimate channels, and contact your healthcare team promptly if symptoms are worsening or preventing you from eating or drinking.

This article is for general information and is not a substitute for personalized medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.