

CHEW THE FAT

Are weight loss injections the key to tackling obesity?

Chugging back protein smoothies, attempting restrictive diets and over exercising – but still can't lose any weight?

Weight loss can be a long and baffling process.

For the UK's unsuccessful dieters, the arrival of semaglutide – known as Wegovy – is a miracle for those struggling to shed the pounds.

The drug, which is self-injected, reduces appetite helping adults lose weight.

And with half the world's population predicted to be obese by 2035, according to The World Obesity Federation, surely an easy solution is the answer.

But does the promotion of weight loss drugs actually address root causes of obesity?

And can it trigger disordered eating and poor body image?

Clinical trials for Wegovy found that the drug could help an obese adult lose 10% of their body weight – 2st on average – alongside healthy eating and exercise.

The National Institute for

Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommended that Wegovy is made available on the NHS.

Weight loss injections like Saxenda can already be purchased from online pharmacies such as Boots, Superdrug and ASDA – and it is expected they will be stocking Wegovy soon.

'Wegovy and Saxenda have been proven to be

effective in assisting weight loss, and those who take the injections should expect a 5 to 10% reduction in weight within six months,' says Dr. Babak Ashrafi at ASDA Online

Doctor. 'Studies have shown that Wegovy is more effective than Saxenda, and is self-administered once a week rather than daily.'

But some studies have suggested that when a patient stops taking the drug, they simply put the weight back on.

'The semaglutide injections have been touted as 'game changing', but long term the benefits are not there,' says Marcelle Rose, a nutritionist and eating disorder specialist.

'Yes, you do lose weight whilst



Would you inject to lose weight?

you are taking the drug, but as soon as you stop the weight will pile back on.

'A study from April last year found that participants regained two-thirds of their weight loss one year after stopping the injections – it does not have data for beyond the year, so we don't know how detrimental the health outcomes are longer term.

'NICE recommends that the medication can be taken for a maximum of two years only – so what happens after that?'

This suggests injections are a quick fix and futile if the weight doesn't stay off – is a healthy, balanced lifestyle is better?

Medications rarely go

without side effects and weight loss injections are no different.

In a recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, 11% of participants that received weight loss injections reported serious adverse events, whilst 62% reported gastrointestinal issues. Other studies have flagged side effects on the thyroid and pancreas.

'Obesity is a complex condition that goes beyond a matter of body fat,' says British Association for Nutrition and Lifestyle-registered nutritionist Eva Humphries. 'My concern is twofold. Weight loss injections fail to address the root cause of obesity, which often goes beyond just poor food choices.'

'By switching the focus to body fat alone, we sideline other elements that are crucial for our wellbeing, including exercise, food-based nutrients and the psychology of eating.'

And ignoring disordered eating surrounding obesity and bingeing can open the door to these products being abused.

With celebrity culture promoting weight loss injections, too, the pressure to

be thin is on. At the Oscars last month, actor and activist Jameela Jamil slammed extreme weight loss on the red carpet.

The images last. But the methods aren't sustainable, nor are they normally sustained, until the next awards season! Jameela wrote. *The images of ageless, weightless women are used as a tool of aspiration.*

'The medications are potentially extremely harmful – anyone might see this as the magic bullet and those struggling with disordered eating and body image problems will be particularly vulnerable to abuse of this medication,' says Marcelle. 'Obesity has been pathologized and people in larger bodies have been stigmatised and told they are the problem.'

However, in order to access weight loss injections there are checks and balances in place.

NICE's draft guidelines for England and Wales, not yet fully approved, say it should be

prescribed by a specialist to obese adults with at least one weight-related health condition such as high blood pressure or heart disease for a maximum of two years.

'At Asda Online Doctor, adults may take these injections if they either have a BMI of between 27 and 30 and a health problem that can affect their weight, such as diabetes or a BMI of 30 or more, even if they do not have a weight related medical condition,' says Dr. Babak.

'You do need a prescription to access these injections, and at Asda Online Doctor, we require those purchasing Saxenda to undergo an initial weight loss consultation.

'A doctor will check if the injection is suitable for you and can assist from there.

'If you don't meet these criteria, your doctor is also able to discuss other weight loss medications that may be better suited for you.'

Is it enough safeguarding? 'The drug is available on prescription, but local high street chemists will be offering it online,' says Marcelle.

'I am concerned physical and psychological screening before prescribing will be inadequate and measures put into place for monitoring health, side effects and duration of treatment will be ineffective, too.'

Dr. Babak disagrees. 'As these injections require a prescription to be accessed, a doctor will always consult those seeking treatment and discuss if it's right for them,' he says. 'If they believe there is a risk of other conditions, like eating disorders, developing as a result of the treatment, alternatives will be discussed.'

'These injections have been made to assist those with certain conditions and weight loss goals to achieve them in a gradual and safe way.'

So where does this leave us? Are weight loss injections an

How to lose weight safely

Eva shares her tips for losing weight in a safe, controlled way.

1. Focus on nutrients, not calories

Nutrients play a vital role in keeping us healthy and feeling in tip top condition. Calories only measure energy.

Switching our focus to nutrients rather than calories may make it easier to lose weight and keep it off.

As a nutritionist, I ask my clients to include the following in every meal:

- **Protein** – this should make up a quarter of a plate of food. Protein keeps us fuller for longer and is an essential building block of the body. Meat, fish, shellfish, beans and pulses are all good sources of protein.
- **Vegetables** – aim for three different types of veggies and approximately half of your plate to be filled with them. Vegetables are a nice source of vitamins and minerals.
- **Carbohydrates** – rice, pasta and potatoes all fall in this category. They are great for energy but should only make up a quarter of our plate of food.



2. Hydrate

Dehydration may be a leading cause of both fatigue and food cravings. If there is one thing we know about food cravings, it's that we are bad at not giving in to them.

The fewer food cravings there are, the greater our resistance to overeating.

Try and aim for eight glasses or two litres of water per day.

3. Get moving, every single day

Our metabolism is more efficient with movement. And, research suggests, increasing muscle mass is the only reliable way to increase our metabolism. The more muscle we have, the higher our metabolic rate and the higher our metabolic rate the easier we may lose body fat.



4. Ditch the scales

Last but not least, throw those scales out. I have worked with hundreds of clients and I'm yet to find a single person that had a great association with the sad step.

The scales don't differentiate between the mass of our muscles or how much water we may be holding onto, it just gives us a single figure.

So instead of worrying about the scales, aim for a monthly waist and hip measurement using a tape measure.

Research suggests we hold more body fat in these areas, so these readings may be more accurate than the scales.

easy fix or a useless one?

'Tackling weight stigma and helping individuals build a healthy relationship with food, their body and movement is far more sustainable than a quick fix drug with terrible side effects, results that won't last and the potential to mess up your body's appetite and metabolism,' Marcelle says.

Weight loss injections are not for everyone. They should not be abused to fit the beauty standard – they were designed to help with obesity and the

associated health conditions.

Consulting with your doctor to make an informed decision is the first step.

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Have you ever felt worried about your weight?



Dr Babak Ashrafi

Half the world's population will be obese by 2035

You can't get weight loss injections without a prescription