

## **Weight loss and New Medications including Wegovy and Zepbound**

### **What You Should Know If You are Considering these Medications for Weight Loss**

1. What are the new weight loss medications?

For weight loss the two most common medications are Wegovy and Zepbound. Wegovy is chemically identical to Ozempic and Zepbound is chemically identical to Mounjaro. However, only diabetic patients have access to Ozempic and Mounjaro. Many insurance companies cover Ozempic and Mounjaro but not Wegovy and Zepbound. There is also Saxenda which is similar to Wegovy but with less weight loss.

2. Who qualifies for Wegovy and Zepbound according to the FDA?

The FDA has approved Wegovy and Zepbound for weight management for adults with obesity ( (body mass index [BMI]  $\geq 30$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>) for overweight (BMI  $\geq 27$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>) with at least one weight-related condition, such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, or high cholesterol and for patients for cardiovascular disease risk reduction in adults with obesity or overweight and established cardiovascular disease, to reduce the risk of major cardiovascular events, including heart attack, stroke, and cardiovascular death.

3. Who qualifies for these medications according to insurance companies?

The answer is highly variable but almost all insurance companies have a complicated and lengthy approval process because these medications are expensive! We CANNOT guarantee that your insurance company will cover these medications even if you have spoken with a representative or gone to a website and found it on covered medication. We have found that some will say they cover the medication but only for patients with diabetes. Some will cover the medication but you may not meet their requirements without trying other medications first. Many insurance companies will not cover them at all.

4. Will White River Family Practice prescribe for me?

At this point, we are only considering weight loss medication for patients who have **Class 3 obesity which is defined as a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 40 or higher or a BMI of 35 with other medical problems** related to weight including hypertension, obstructive sleep apnea, high cholesterol, prediabetes, heartburn, incontinence, heart disease or fatty liver disease. Patients who meet these criteria have the greatest need for rate reduction to avoid medical complications that could shorten their lives.

Current studies also show that patients who stop taking Wegovy or Zepbound regain lost weight. These medications are most appropriate for individuals who need to take them LIFELONG to maintain good health.

5. How do I calculate my BMI to see if I qualify?

<https://www.cdc.gov/bmi/adult-calculator/index.html>

6. Why is White River Family Practice limiting the medications to those with Class 3 obesity?

..because of the time-consuming nature of prior authorizations. If we prescribed these medications for all patients who qualify based on the FDA approval, we would be unable to perform any other function of a primary care office. Yes, it is that time consuming!

7. If I qualify what happens next?

We will offer you a visit for evaluation, documentation and discussion about therapy. We will not prescribe these medications over the phone because we will need documentation to support the request.

Almost all insurance companies require that you have tried other weight loss options through a structured program. Please bring a list of the programs/diets (Weight Watchers, My Fitness Pal, Nutrisystems, NOOM, etc.) you have tried so far including the approximate dates of the trials and the outcomes. Please also provide us with any structured exercise you have

done in the past. If you have tried other weight loss medications, please provide those and the results.

We will also carefully review your personal and family history as some patients will also not qualify due to a personal or family history of medullary thyroid cancer or multiple endocrine neoplasia syndrome type 2.

Lastly, we will prepare you for potential side effects of the medication and discuss with you that the medication is currently a LIFETIME commitment as most patients will regain weight if medications are stopped.

Then, we will ask you to be patient with us as we work through the prior authorization process.

#### 8. What else should I know about these medications?

The new medications are GLP-1 agonists (Wegovy) and GLP1 and GIP agonists (Zepbound). An agonist activates the receptors. They work by slowing down your gut and telling your brain that you are full.

Common side effects including nausea, bloating and constipation. It is very important to stay hydrated and be prepared through food intake or medication to combat constipation.

For every 5 pounds of weight lost, the typical person will lose 1 pound of muscle. In order to avoid losing muscle, we recommend a high protein diet and resistance or weight training in addition to these medications.

Current studies show that most people will regain weight lost if they stop taking these medications, so patients who start these medications and achieve success will be recommended to continue at this time.

While presumed safe, particularly for patients with risk factors of diabetes or class 3 obesity, the long-term safety of these medications are still under investigation.

#### 9. What else can I do to help manage my weight?

If you do not qualify for these weight loss medications, your insurance will not cover them, or you have switched insurance and lost your coverage, we can help you in other ways including providing

- a) Referral to a nutritionist
- b) A Letter of medical necessity which may help lower your cost at a fitness center
- c) Discussion about other medications that might be covered like metformin or Contrave
- d) Referral to the Weight and Wellness program at DHMC

10. Anything else I should know?

Weight loss is difficult and unhappiness with our image often brings up a lot of emotions. It is important to understand that being overweight or obese is a worldwide problem and not a personal failing! Our goal is to support you in feeling healthy, having healthy habits and loving your body no matter what the scale says!