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How GLP-1 Medications Help Manage Diabetes

GLP-1 receptor agonists are a newer class of medications that help manage type 2 diabetes in a different way than older drugs. These medicines act in the gut to signal the pancreas to release insulin, helping the body use glucose more efficiently. They also slow digestion, which helps control blood sugar levels throughout the day.

Because digestion slows down, your body absorbs carbohydrates more gradually, avoiding rapid spikes in blood sugar.

Weight Loss and Other Benefits

Although these medications were not originally designed for weight loss, many patients experience it as a welcome side effect. By curbing appetite and slowing digestion, GLP-1s help people lose extra pounds while improving blood sugar control.

In addition to lowering glucose levels, GLP-1 medications can also:

- Support healthy weight management
- Reduce the risk of heart disease
- Slow the progression of kidney disease
- Improve long-term diabetes management

How GLP-1s Differ From Older Diabetes Medications

Traditional diabetes treatments—such as insulin and some oral medications—help lower blood sugar, but can sometimes cause weight gain. GLP-1 receptor agonists, on the other hand, often promote mild weight loss. This makes them an appealing option for many people with type 2 diabetes.

Your Valley Health clinician can help determine when it may be time to consider switching or adding a GLP-1 medication based on your medical history, blood sugar levels, and overall health goals.

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Who May or May Not Be a Good Candidate

Anyone diagnosed with type 2 diabetes could be a potential candidate. However, these medications aren't right for everyone. They may not be recommended for people with:

- A personal or family history of medullary thyroid cancer
- A family history of multiple endocrine neoplasia (MEN)
- Pancreatitis or gastroparesis

Your doctor will evaluate your health history before prescribing GLP-1 therapy.

Possible Side Effects

Because GLP-1s work in the gut, most side effects are mild and digestive in nature, such as:

- Nausea
- Constipation or diarrhea

These effects often improve after the first few doses. Eating smaller, low-fat meals can also help reduce stomach upset.

The Importance of Lifestyle Habits

GLP-1 medications are effective tools, but they work best when paired with lifestyle changes. A balanced diet, portion control, and regular physical activity remain key to good diabetes management. These medicines are meant to support—not replace—healthy habits.

If you have type 2 diabetes and want to know whether GLP-1 medication is right for you, the trusted physicians at Valley Health are here to help.

To learn more or schedule a visit, go to valleyhealth.org.