



Guidance for the sport and physical activity sector on understanding the use of weight management medications

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Introduction

This guidance has been developed by the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) and ukactive to support professionals in the sport and physical activity sector in understanding the role of weight loss medicines such as GLP-1 (Glucagon-Like Peptide-1) receptor agonists and other similar medications and their implications for health, fitness and performance.

With the growing profile and prevalence of anti-obesity medications as a medical intervention for managing type 2 diabetes and obesity, it is vital for the sport and physical activity workforce to be equipped with the knowledge and tools to support clients who may be using, or considering using, these medications.

This document aims to:

- increase awareness of pharmacological treatments, such as GLP-1 agonists and their physiological effects
- provide practical strategies and support for tailoring activity programmes and lifestyle advice
- highlight the importance of knowing when to refer clients to healthcare professionals.

This guidance has been informed by evidence-based research, consultation with healthcare experts and feedback from professionals across the sector. By aligning with the sector's standards for professional competence and ethical practice, which are managed by CIMSPA, it ensures that professionals working in the sector are prepared to meet the needs of diverse client groups while promoting safe and effective physical activity interventions.

Professionals are encouraged to use this document as a resource to enhance their practice, foster collaboration with healthcare providers and deliver client-centred support that considers physical activity, medication and health strategies.



What is obesity?

Obesity is a complex chronic condition influenced by a mix of genetics, environment and societal influences.

Recent research has shown that genes play a much bigger role in obesity than was once thought, making those with certain genes more susceptible to gaining weight. Others have a combination of many small genetic differences that, when combined with modern diets and sedentary lifestyles, make it much harder to maintain a healthy weight. Additionally, researchers have discovered that fat cells have “memory”, meaning that once someone has been overweight, their body may work against them when they try to lose weight and keep it off.

Understanding these complexities is crucial in the sport and physical activity sector. Too often, weight loss is treated as a simple matter of eating less and moving more, but this approach ignores the biological challenges many people face. When fitness professionals recognise that obesity is influenced by genetics and other factors beyond willpower, they can take a more compassionate

and personalised approach. Instead of just looking at their individual actions for reasons why a person may have a weight management problem, professionals can support them with strategies tailored to their unique needs, making it easier to achieve lasting, healthy changes. This shift can help reduce the stigma around obesity and create a more supportive and realistic fitness culture.

What is GLP-1?

GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide-1) is a hormone that regulates blood sugar levels, appetite and energy balance. It is naturally produced in the body and plays a key role in energy metabolism. GLP-1 receptor agonists, medications designed to mimic this hormone, are widely used to manage type 2 diabetes, obesity and other metabolic conditions.

Why is it important that sport and physical activity professionals understand weight management medications?

Health and performance: Weight management medications affect energy metabolism and can influence physical performance, recovery and overall health outcomes. Professionals need to be aware of the potential impact of reduced calorie intake on clients, including their ability to recover or undertake certain types of physical activity.

Changing client demographics: With the growing use of anti-obesity medications, professionals are increasingly likely to encounter clients using, or considering using, these medications.

Supporting clients: Knowledge of these pharmacological treatments allows professionals to provide informed, tailored advice and support about physical activity in relation to these medications, helping clients achieve their health and fitness goals safely. Professionals need to ensure that clients are aware of the risks of muscle loss and the importance of closely monitoring their nutrition, hydration and gradual progression of training intensity. If concerns arise, signpost to an accredited healthcare provider.

Understand the opportunity: Physical activity plays a crucial role in maximising the sustainability and success of the GLP-1 receptor agonist and other similar medications. By enhancing weight loss, influencing healthy behaviours, improving metabolic health and preventing weight regain once medication is stopped, physical activity is a vital component of a comprehensive treatment plan and presents a significant opportunity for the sector to integrate activity programmes specifically tailored to anti-obesity medication users.

Key knowledge areas for the workforce

How GLP-1 works: GLP-1 stimulates insulin secretion, reduces appetite and slows gastric emptying, helping regulate blood sugar and weight.

Medications to be aware of:

Common GLP-1 receptor agonists include:

- Tirzepatide (e.g. Mounjaro)
- Semaglutide (e.g. Ozempic, Wegovy)
- Liraglutide (e.g. Saxenda, Victoza)

Note that there are further injectable and oral obesity medications in the research and development pipeline within the GLP-1 receptor agonist group of medications.

Users of weight management medications: These medications are commonly prescribed to individuals with type 2 diabetes, obesity or metabolic syndrome to manage weight and improve metabolic health. These pharmacological treatments are prescribed to treat obesity when the individual has a BMI of 27 or above with at least one weight-related condition such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol or type 2 diabetes. Without a weight-related condition, the individual needs to have a BMI of 30 or above.

Practical considerations in sport and physical activity

- **Programme design:** Adjust exercise intensity and duration to accommodate side effects such as nausea, fatigue or reduced appetite. Individualise the training approach based on the client's specific response to the medication and their health goals.
- **Gradual adjustment:** Gradually build activity levels to match clients' capacity, avoiding overexertion and consider the timing of activity in relation to meals to ensure that activity is fuelled appropriately.
- **Weight management support:** Ensure clients are aware of the benefits of regular exercise alongside weight loss medicines that they may be taking.
- **Resistance training:** Incorporate resistance training to help preserve muscle mass during weight loss.
- **Promote adequate protein intake:** Ensure clients are consuming sufficient protein to support muscle recovery and maintenance.
- **Lifestyle education:** Promote a well-rounded lifestyle with balanced nutrition, quality sleep, hydration and stress management to support overall health. For example, nausea and gastrointestinal side-effects can lead to dehydration, so it is important to promote regular fluid intake.
- **Awareness of side-effects:** Be aware of symptoms like nausea, which may require adjustments in workout timing or intensity.

Supporting clients effectively

Build trust and rapport: Create an open, non-judgmental environment where clients feel comfortable discussing their experiences and challenges.

Tailored support: Actively listen to clients concerns about how weight management medications affect their activity levels or fitness goals.

Adapt training programmes to address individual needs and limitations.

Provide accurate, impartial information: Educate clients about the role of weight management medications as part of a holistic health strategy, emphasising the importance of an active lifestyle and balanced habits.



Knowing when to signpost to accredited healthcare professionals

Recognising red flags: Severe or persistent side effects such as extreme fatigue, nausea, dizziness or significant unintended weight loss are all causes for concern and may be signs of anti-obesity medications affecting overall health or specific health conditions.

Advise your client to speak to a healthcare professional if they are experiencing any of these symptoms.

Collaborative approach: Encourage clients to consult their healthcare provider if they have questions or concerns about their medication.

Work in partnership with healthcare professionals to ensure a safe and effective plan for the client.

Ethical and professional considerations

Stay within your scope: Avoid offering medical advice or opinions on weight management medications. Focus on your role in supporting physical activity and lifestyle changes.

Maintain privacy: Respect client confidentiality when discussing their use of any medications.

Signpost to accredited healthcare professionals for any questions or concerns about their medication.

Guidance for education partners and learners

For education partners developing training

Education providers delivering training for sport and physical activity professionals should consider:

- **Anti-obesity medications CPD:** Include modules on the physiological effects of these pharmacological treatments, their medical applications and their relevance to fitness and health. Note it is essential that the content is approved by accredited medical professionals.
- **Highlight practical applications:** Teach how to tailor exercise programmes for clients using weight management medications, focusing on safe, gradual progression and holistic health strategies.
- **Emphasise collaboration:** Provide training on working alongside accredited healthcare professionals, understanding referral pathways and managing client confidentiality.
- **Stay up to date:** Regularly update course content to reflect the latest research, clinical guidelines and industry best practices for weight management medication therapies.

For learners seeking training

Learners looking for training opportunities should seek courses that:

- **Address emerging trends:** Include content on anti-obesity medications and their implications for fitness and health.
- **Focus on practical application:** Provide hands-on opportunities to learn how to adapt exercise programmes for diverse client needs, including those using pharmacological treatments.
- **Promote multidisciplinary knowledge:** Cover collaboration with accredited healthcare professionals, client support and effective communication strategies.
- **Offers endorsement:** Ensure training is CIMSPA endorsed.



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