

Understanding GLP-1s: Next Generation Diabetes Medications

GLP-1s are a common class of medication used for treatment of Type 2 diabetes, and some also are approved for weight loss. There's a lot to know about what they do, how they're prescribed, and what to expect if you've just been prescribed, or already take, a GLP-1.



What are GLP-1s?

GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide-1) agonists are a type of medication for people with Type 2 diabetes. Some have been approved for weight management for people who are considered obese. These medications are typically taken by injection, either daily or weekly, and work in a unique way – they mimic a hormone in the body that helps manage appetite and blood sugar. For many people, this results in weight loss.

Why is the handling of GLP-1 prescriptions changing?

Certain higher dose GLP-1s have been FDA-approved for weight loss (e.g., Saxenda or Wegovy). However, some people are being prescribed lower-dose GLP-1s, approved to treat Type 2 diabetes (e.g., Trulicity, Ozempic, or Mounjaro), for weight-loss purposes.

When a medication is prescribed for a purpose other than a condition it's been FDA-approved to treat, that's known as "off-label" prescribing. And the number of GLP-1s being prescribed off-label has been steadily increasing. This has created shortages for patients who need those medications to treat their Type 2 diabetes.

To protect the health of people who need these medications for diabetes treatment, your prescription plan has put additional requirements in place before these claims will be processed.

Why are there shortages of some of the GLP-1s?

The FDA is reporting shortages of some GLP-1s due to an increase in demand for this class of medications. In addition to treating diabetes, GLP-1s also can help with weight loss, and off-label prescribing is contributing to the shortage. If a member can't get their prescribed medication due to a shortage, they're encouraged to work with their provider on an appropriate alternative.



What does this mean for you?

Before a GLP-1 medication is dispensed to you, it may have to undergo a prior authorization (PA) review. These reviews are used for a wide variety of medications to confirm that the medication is being prescribed for its intended use based on FDA approval guidelines and standards of care.

- If your plan requires a PA for GLP-1s approved for Type 2 diabetes, you won't be able to fill your GLP-1 prescription immediately. If this happens, call your prescribing doctor and let them know your medication requires a PA – they'll need to file paperwork for your prescription to confirm a Type 2 diabetes diagnosis. If your plan covers GLP-1s approved for weight management and requires a PA for them, your doctor should file PA paperwork confirming a diagnosis related to weight management.
- Your prescription will be approved or denied based on the information your doctor provides, and you'll be notified of the decision by mail.

What can you do in the meantime?

Talk with your doctor about any questions you have regarding your GLP-1 prescription. This can help you understand your prescription and avoid surprises at the pharmacy counter.

Your plan in your hands

Your health is important to you, and your pharmacy benefits are a big part of that. RxBenefits' Member Portal lets you access your plan, track your prior authorizations, and communicate with our team when and where you need to.

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