Integrative Mental Health of the Midwest
Patient Education Series

Understanding Semaglutide

A once-weekly medication that mimics your body's natural fullness hormone to support weight, blood sugar, heart, kidney, and liver health.

BRAND NAMES
Ozempic® · Wegovy®
Same active ingredient: semaglutide

HOW IT'S TAKEN
Once weekly
Small injection under the skin of the belly, thigh, or upper arm

MEDICATION TYPE
GLP-1 receptor agonist
A long-acting version of the natural hormone GLP-1

DOSING
Start low, go slow
Begins at 0.25 mg; increased in steps about every 4 weeks as tolerated

THE BASICS

What is semaglutide?

After you eat, your gut releases a natural hormone called **GLP-1**. It tells your pancreas how much insulin to release, signals your brain that you're full, and slows digestion so energy from food is used steadily.

Natural GLP-1 lasts only minutes. Semaglutide is designed to act on the same receptor but stay active for about a week, so **one dose works around the clock** between injections.

> **One of the most-studied metabolic medicines:** large trials show benefits for weight, blood sugar, heart, kidneys, liver, and joints. In STEP 1, **86%** of people lost at least 5% of their body weight.

COMMERCIALLY AVAILABLE FORMS

Typical approved uses

2017	**Type 2 diabetes** — blood sugar control (Ozempic); heart protection added 2020
2021	**Weight management** — obesity, or overweight plus a related condition; ages 12+ (Wegovy)
2024	**Heart protection** — fewer heart attacks, strokes & CV deaths in adults with heart disease and overweight (Wegovy)
2025	**Kidney & liver** — kidney protection in diabetes with CKD (Ozempic); MASH fatty liver with fibrosis (Wegovy)
2026	**Wegovy HD** — higher 7.2 mg weekly dose

Approvals apply to brand-name Ozempic® and Wegovy®; compounded semaglutide is not FDA-approved.

BRAIN + BODY

How it works

In the brain

- **Hunger center (hypothalamus).** Turns down hunger signals and turns up fullness, so smaller portions feel satisfying.
- **Reward pathways.** Quiets "food noise" and cravings. Research shows similar effects on alcohol cravings and drinking.
- **Brainstem.** Relays fullness signals from the gut — and is where early nausea starts, which is why doses rise slowly.

In the body

- **Pancreas.** Releases insulin only when blood sugar is elevated, and lowers glucagon, which keeps the liver from over-producing sugar.
- **Stomach.** Slows emptying, so you feel full longer after meals.
- **Liver & kidneys.** Reduces liver fat and inflammation, and helps slow kidney decline in diabetes.
- **Heart & blood vessels.** Lowers blood pressure, triglycerides, and markers of inflammation.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

Potential benefits

Results below come from clinical trials; individual results vary. Each card is labeled so you can see how strong the evidence is.

FDA-APPROVED Approved use of brand-name forms

STRONG EVIDENCE Large randomized trials

EMERGING Promising trials, more coming

EARLY RESEARCH Being actively studied

Metabolic health

Meaningful, lasting weight loss — FDA-APPROVED

~15% average body weight lost over 68 weeks

In the STEP 1 trial, people lost 14.9% of their body weight on average, versus 2.4% on placebo. A higher 7.2 mg dose was approved in 2026.

Blood sugar & type 2 diabetes — FDA-APPROVED

1.5–1.8 pts typical A1C reduction

Across the SUSTAIN trials, semaglutide lowered A1C more than several other diabetes medicines, while also reducing weight.

Heart & cardiovascular protection — FDA-APPROVED

20% fewer heart attacks, strokes & CV deaths

In SELECT (17,604 adults with heart disease and overweight), semaglutide also lowered blood pressure, triglycerides, and waist size.

Kidney protection — FDA-APPROVED

24% lower risk of major kidney events

In people with type 2 diabetes and kidney disease (FLOW trial), kidney function declined more slowly and risk of death from any cause was 20% lower.

Inflammation & inflammatory conditions

Lower whole-body inflammation — STRONG EVIDENCE

~38% lower hs-CRP vs. placebo at 2 years

hs-CRP, a key inflammation marker tied to heart risk, dropped within 4–8 weeks — even in people who lost little weight. STEP trials saw drops of more than 50%.

Liver inflammation (MASH) — FDA-APPROVED

63% vs. 34% MASH resolution vs. placebo

In the ESSENCE biopsy trial, liver inflammation cleared without worsening scarring, and fibrosis improved in 37% vs. 22% on placebo.

Knee osteoarthritis pain — STRONG EVIDENCE

−42 vs. −28 points on a 100-point pain scale

In STEP 9, adults with obesity and knee osteoarthritis had significantly less knee pain and better physical function than with placebo.

Heart failure (HFpEF) — STRONG EVIDENCE

43% vs. 7% drop in hs-CRP

In people with obesity and a stiff-heart type of heart failure, symptoms, physical limits, and inflammation improved markedly.

Brain & behavior

Less "food noise" & fewer cravings

STRONG EVIDENCE

People report less hunger, less preoccupation with food, and fewer cravings, which makes healthier choices feel easier to sustain.

Alcohol use & cravings

EMERGING

Three randomized trials found reduced heavy drinking and cravings. In a 2026 Lancet trial, heavy drinking days fell 41 points vs. 26 on placebo.

YOUR TREATMENT

What to expect

Common, usually temporary effects

Most side effects are digestive, mild to moderate, and most noticeable in the days after starting or increasing a dose. They typically ease as your body adjusts.

Nausea · diarrhea · constipation · decreased appetite · indigestion or reflux · vomiting · tiredness · mild injection-site redness

> **Your pace, your plan.** If side effects are bothersome, let us know. We can often slow the schedule or keep you at your current dose longer while your body adjusts.

Tips for feeling your best

- Eat smaller meals slowly and stop at the first sign of fullness.
- Prioritize protein at each meal and add strength training to protect muscle.
- Drink water steadily through the day, especially if you have GI symptoms.
- Go easy on greasy, fried, or very sweet foods, and on alcohol.
- Take your dose on the same day each week; rotate injection sites.

Call us promptly if you notice

- ! Severe stomach pain that won't go away, with or without vomiting (possible pancreatitis)
- ! Pain in the upper right belly, fever, yellow skin or eyes, or clay-colored stools (gallbladder)
- ! Vomiting or diarrhea that keeps you from staying hydrated
- ! Sudden vision loss or rapidly worsening eyesight in one or both eyes — seek care right away
- ! A lump or swelling in the neck, trouble swallowing, or ongoing hoarseness
- ! Swelling of the face, lips, or throat, or trouble breathing — call 911
- ! New or worsening low mood, anxiety, or thoughts of self-harm (call or text 988 any time)

Tell your provider before starting if you

- Have a personal or family history of medullary thyroid cancer or MEN 2 (semaglutide should not be used)
- Have had pancreatitis, gallbladder, kidney, or severe stomach-emptying problems
- Have diabetic eye disease (retinopathy) or prior optic-nerve problems
- Take insulin or a sulfonylurea (risk of low blood sugar may rise)
- Are pregnant, planning pregnancy, or breastfeeding
- Have upcoming surgery or sedation — your care team needs to know

> **A long-term partner, not a quick fix.** Semaglutide works best alongside nutrition, movement, sleep, and mental-health care. Benefits tend to continue while you take it; if it's stopped, appetite and weight often return, so we'll plan any changes together.

PARTNERING IN YOUR CARE

Getting the most from treatment

Your dosing journey

A typical new or restart plan is 0.25 mg weekly for 4 weeks, then 0.5 mg weekly for the rest of the 12-week interval. Any further increases happen in steps of at least 4 weeks, and you may stay at whichever dose works best for you.



0.25 mg
Starter dose
weeks 1–4

0.5 mg
Weeks 5–12
typical plan

1 mg
If needed

1.7 mg
If needed

2.4 mg
Standard
maintenance dose

Four pillars that amplify results

1

Protein first

Aim for protein at every meal to preserve muscle while you lose fat.

2

Strength & movement

Resistance training 2–3 times a week keeps metabolism and strength up.

3

Fluids & fiber

Steady water, vegetables, and whole grains ease constipation and nausea.

4

Sleep & mood

Rest and mental-health support strengthen appetite and stress regulation.

PRICING & CONSULTS

Scan to view pricing and request a consult

Compare 3-month supply tiers and the monthly breakdown for each. Consult fee: **$99** for new GLP-1 starts; **waived** if you're currently on a GLP-1 or took one within the last 6 months (proof of treatment required).

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My questions & notes

Important: This handout is for general education and does not replace advice from your healthcare provider or the official Medication Guide. Trial results reflect group averages under study conditions; your results may differ. Some uses described here are investigational or off-label. Boxed warning: semaglutide caused thyroid C-cell tumors in rodents; it is unknown whether it causes these tumors in humans. Compounded formulations, if prescribed, are not FDA-approved and have not been reviewed by the FDA for safety, effectiveness, or quality.

References

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