



Heart to Heart

NEWS FROM ST. LUKE COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

POSTAL
CUSTOMER

NONPROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MISSOULA MT
ECRMSSDDM
PI#90

NO MAGIC PILLS

Healthy lifestyle habits increase short and long-term benefits of GLP-1 meds

THE POPULARITY OF GLP-1 MEDICATIONS FOR WEIGHT LOSS has soared in recent years with an estimated 6% of U.S. adults currently taking them. St. Luke Community Healthcare provider Dr. Isaac Billings explains what these medications are, how they work and how to maximize their efficacy by combining their use with healthy lifestyle habits.

“There are actually two classes of medications that are of interest here: Glucagon-Like Peptide Receptor Agonists (GLP-1s) and Glucose-Dependent Insulinotropic Polypeptide/ Glucagon-Like Peptide Receptor Agonists (GIP/GLP-1s). GLP-1’s includes semaglutide (brand names of Ozempic, Wegovy, and Rybelsus), dulaglutide (Trulicity), exenatide (Bydureon), and liraglutide (Victoza). GIP/GLP-1s currently only have one in class medication called tirzepatide (Mounjaro),” he said. “These medications are primarily utilized for the treatment of diabetes mellitus type II and obesity though they also have utility for the treatment of



Dr. Isaac Billings, a physician at St. Luke Community Healthcare Clinic - Ridgewater, holds out two of the most prescribed GLP-1 medications for weight loss.

several other medical conditions including fatty liver disease, heart failure, and chronic kidney disease. There is ongoing research regarding medicinal applications of these medications and there will likely be additional indications for their use in the future.”

Originally developed as a medication to treat type 2 diabetes, “these medications have a complex mechanism of action,” Dr. Isaac Billings explains. “In brief, they activate glucagon like peptide 1 receptors and, in the case of tirzepatide, glucose dependent insulinotropic polypeptide receptors. These receptors are widely distributed throughout the body but have high concentrations within the gastrointestinal tract, pancreas, and the brain. They play important regulatory roles in the management of hunger, satiety, digestion, blood sugars, insulin, and gut motility. When you eat a meal and digestion occurs, these medications improve the body’s sensitivity to rising blood sugars with improved insulin secretion and insulin sensitivity

resulting in significant improvement in the body’s management of blood sugar levels. Additionally, activation of these receptors subdues the body’s sense of hunger and food cravings, slows intestinal motility, and contributes to a greater sense of satiety. These affects are felt to be the primary mechanisms by which these medications help with weight loss.”

Though there are risks and benefits to everything, as a general rule, GLP-1 medications are low risk and carry the potential for significant medical benefit.

“These medications are very effective in the treatment of their FDA approved indications,” Dr. Isaac Billings said. “They have revolutionized the management of type II diabetes and weight loss.”

Some of the pros include: the convenience of one-day dosing options, rare incidence of hypoglycemia from these medications due to their mechanism of action, and though side effects and adverse

continued on next page

NEWLY NOTED

Ambient AI allows providers more face time, less screen time

AMBIENT AI, A TECHNOLOGY THAT LISTENS TO THE NATURAL CONVERSATION between a patient and provider during a visit — without the need for typing or note-taking, is being introduced at St. Luke Community Healthcare.

“It uses speech recognition and machine learning to generate clinical documentation in real time, allowing providers to focus more on their patients and less on their screens,” explains St. Luke Community Healthcare Clinics Manager Kris Schallock.

During a visit, the Ambient AI tool passively listens in the background. After the encounter, it generates a structured medical note, which the provider can review, edit if needed, and sign off on. “The goal is to create a seamless experience that doesn’t interrupt the flow of the appointment,” he said.

“This change won’t affect the clinic visit but should improve the patient experience by allowing the provider to engage more in the conversation,” adds St. Luke Community Healthcare Physician Dr. Kelli Larson.

The system uses natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning to interpret conversations, identify key clinical information, and format it according to charting standards. Providers retain full control over the documentation. They review and approve each note before it becomes part of the patient’s permanent medical record. “The AI supports the provider but does not replace their judgment or oversight,” Schallock said.

“Security is a top priority,” he added. “Companies providing the service follow strict HIPAA compliance standards. The data is encrypted and handled in secure environments to ensure patient confidentiality. The generated notes are integrated into the provider’s electronic health record (EHR) system. And the AI service provider does not retain audio recordings—only the final documentation is saved in the patient’s electronic medical record with St. Luke.”

Only authorized healthcare staff—those with access to the EHR—can view the finalized doc-

continued on next page

THANK YOU LEGISLATORS FOR MEDICAID SUPPORT

AS WE CONTINUE OUR MISSION to provide the highest quality healthcare for our community, we want to take a moment to express our sincere gratitude to our local state elected officials for their steadfast support by continuing Medicaid in its present form for our state. The local legislators that voted in favor of this include: Greg Hertz, Shelly Fyant, Linda Reksten, Jacinda Morigeau, Thedis Crowe, and Susan Webber. For a complete list of all legislators that supported Medicaid visit: <https://montanamedicaidworks.org/support-for-medic-aid/>. Their commitment ensures that individuals and families—especially those in rural communities—have access to the essential care they need, strengthening the health and well-being of our community. We are also closely watching developments at the federal level regarding any potential changes to Medicaid and will do our best to keep you informed of any changes that may impact our healthcare landscape. Healthcare is not only about treating illness but also about prevention and wellness. With summer approaching, we encourage all community members to prioritize their health by scheduling a well-check visit. For families with children, this is an excellent time to ensure your child is up-to-date on routine health screenings, so get a well-child check including a sports physical. These exams play a vital role in detecting potential concerns early



and ensuring your child is ready to participate safely in activities. We also want to highlight the invaluable benefits of having a trusted family medicine physician as your primary care provider. A family doctor builds long-term relationships with patients as well as whole families, helping coordinate care, provide preventive services, and address health concerns with a deeper understanding of their patients’ medical history. Establishing care with a family medicine physician can lead to better health outcomes, better satisfaction with the care you receive and more personalized treatment. Finally, we wish to extend a heartfelt thank you to our dedicated staff, who continue to go above and beyond to serve our community. Their hard work, compassion, and unwavering commitment make a difference in the lives of our patients every single day. During Hospital Week, celebrated from May 12 through 16, we had the opportunity to recognize and honor the incredible contributions of our healthcare professionals. Their efforts reflect our hospital’s mission and remind us all why compassionate care is at the heart of what we do. Thank you for being part of this journey with us, and for trusting us with your care. We remain committed to serving you with excellence, dedication, and compassion.

Warm regards,

Steve

GLP-1s (from page 1)

events exist, they are generally low risk medications.

Cons include: moderate incidence of side effects (up to 30% of users will experience some form of intestinal upset), frustrations with insurance coverage, high cost, and frequent supply shortages.

Dr. Isaac Billings notes that the primary side effect is stomach upset due to the slowing of gastric motility. "This can present as acid reflux, nausea and constipation intermixed with episodes of sudden urgency to defecate with episodes of loose bowel movements," he said. "These side effects can be managed by dietary strategies (smaller and perhaps more frequent meals), avoiding particular food triggers, staying upright for a period of time after eating and going for a walk to help with gut motility, and with medications that can treat nausea and/or counteract the slowing of intestinal motility. A commonly prescribed medication for this is called

metoclopramide (Reglan)."

While true adverse events are rare, complications to watch out for include: allergic reaction, pancreatitis, gallbladder disease (increased risk of stones, sludging, irritation, infection), worsening of diabetic retinopathy, medullary thyroid carcinoma (it is uncertain if this is a true complication of this class of medications as there have only been a couple documented cases), hypoglycemia (even though low blood sugar levels are one of the "pros" of this

"It is important to remember that the most important 'medicine' for the treatment of type II diabetes and obesity is how you live your life (i.e. healthy dietary and exercise habits.)"

- Dr. Isaac Billings

class of medication compared to other diabetic medications, the risk still exists.) Though research is ongoing, GLP-1s are not recommended during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

"These medications do seem to carry protective benefits for the heart, vascular system, kidneys, and potentially even the brain," Dr. Isaac Billings adds. "For these reasons, you will often see individuals with heart failure or early stages of chronic kidney disease utilizing these medications.

There is also ongoing research around their use for mitigating symptoms of Alzheimer's and slowing its course."

Though they can be effective, Dr. Isaac Billings reminds people that these medications do not replace healthy dietary and exercise habits. "It is important to remember that the most important 'medicine' for the treatment of type II diabetes and obesity is how you live your life (i.e. healthy dietary and exercise habits)," he said.

When taken alongside healthy lifestyle habits, the benefits of GLP-1s are maximized and the weight loss potential is significantly increased. He cautions that without implementing lifestyle changes to maintain weight loss, patients may have rebound weight gain when they stop taking GLP-1 medications.

Perhaps most importantly, Dr. Isaac Billings urges people to remember that GLP-1s "are a tool, not a magic pill. (And) The use of these medications should be done prudently under the guidance of a medical provider you trust."

"Ambient AI really reduces the administrative burden on providers, helping them spend more time with patients and less time documenting."

- Kris Schallock, St. Luke Community Healthcare Clinics Manager

Ambient AI (from page 1)

umentation. Just like with any medical record, access is limited to those directly involved in the patient's care.

Patients can always choose to opt out and not have their visit recorded or transcribed by Ambient AI. "We have our reception staff discuss its use at check in and our providers also inform patients when it's being used and respect their choice to opt out if they so choose," Schallock said.

"Ambient AI really reduces the administrative burden on providers, helping them spend more time with patients and less time documenting," he added. "For patients, it means more face-to-face time and a more focused visit. It also leads to more complete, accurate records."

Dr. Larson agrees. "This technology is very valuable in that it is saving providers time in documenting the clinic visit, and also enabling them to focus wholly on the patient, with less demand for typing and documentation during the visit."



Dr. Kelli Larson speaks with a patient while the Ambient AI app on her phone records notes of the visit.

Durable Medical Equipment, home oxygen available for St. Luke patients

THOSE WHO NEED DURABLE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT (home medical equipment), such as home oxygen, positive airway pressure machines (PAP), like CPAP and BiPAP equipment, along with supporting supplies such as masks, headgear, hoses, filters and heated humidifiers are able to get these items from St. Luke Community Healthcare. DME can also include wheelchairs, walkers, and hospital beds.

According to St. Luke Community Healthcare Cardiopulmonary Department Manager Brandon Hungerford, insurances will reimburse for most of the above-mentioned equipment with a provider's prescription.

In most cases, the beneficiary must have met certain qualifications for insurances to pay. Examples would be: to qualify for home oxygen, a client would need to have a blood oxygen level less than 88%

(normal resting spO2, or oxygen saturation, is 94-98% on just regular air in the environment). They would also need a qualifying diagnosis to support the medical need.

Other examples: to qualify for a (PAP) device would be somebody who has had a sleep study and was diagnosed with sleep apnea (they stop breathing while they sleep, often throughout their sleep cycle). Orthopedic braces, like a knee brace, would usually be placed on an individual in a clinic or ER visit for some form of injury or defect to the knee. In any case, once again, a prescription along with supporting documentation is necessary for most insurances to reimburse the DME company on behalf of the beneficiary.

A lot of DME equipment is billed out to the insurance or self-pay as a capped rental item. This means that the DME company is allowed to bill monthly for the equip-

ment for so many months, and then the beneficiary owns it. An example would be for a CPAP machine, the capped rental period is 13 months. After 13 months of billing, along with the patient's compliant use of the equipment, it then belongs to them. There is, however, continued billing for disposable supplies necessary for that machine to work, such as masks, filters, humidifier chambers, hoses, etc. (insurances usually will only cover disposable item after so many days of use before they will reimburse the DME company for them). Often, with big-ticket items, insurances will only reimburse for a new device after so many years of use. For example, an oxygen concentrator or PAP machine is every 5 years after the last capped billing month.

Many patients benefit from receiving DME to help treat many things that may ail them, such as hypoxia (low oxygen levels), OSA (obstructive sleep apnea), hurt joints or bones, and many more ailments. By treating or correcting these issues, it helps the patient to live a fuller life.



FOUNDATION NEWS: Save the date! Annual Foundation Dinner is Sept. 19

WE'RE THRILLED TO ANNOUNCE that the 25th Annual St. Luke Community Healthcare Foundation Dinner & Auction is set for Friday, September 19, 2025, at the Ronan Community Center!

This year marks a very special milestone — our Silver Anniversary — and we couldn't be more excited to celebrate 25 Years of Giving and Growing with all of you. Our 2025 theme, "A Legacy in Bloom," honors the incredible generosity of our community over the years and the impact we've made together.



Tammy Campbell

The spotlight of this year's fundraising efforts is our New Beginnings Birth Center. This beautifully designed space features three spacious, home-like suites where labor, delivery, recovery, and postpartum care all happen in one comforting setting. With amenities like private Jacuzzi tubs, large window seats, cable TV, and even a nearby C-section suite for added peace of mind, our birth center is truly a gem for local families.

Funds raised at this year's event will help us refresh and update the birth center, ensuring we continue to meet the highest medical standards while maintaining the cozy, welcoming atmosphere that makes our care so special.

There are so many ways to get involved! You can:

- Donate items for the auction
- Purchase tickets
- Give to our general fund
- Or even leave a legacy gift

We'll be sending out save-the-date cards in June, and you can stay up to speed on all the details by following us on social media and visiting our website.

No matter how you choose to support the Foundation, know that your gift makes a lasting difference in the lives of patients and families throughout our community. Have questions or want to get involved? Contact Tammy Campbell, Executive Director, at tcampbell@stlukehealthcare.org or (406) 528-5324 — she'd love to hear from you.

Let's make this 25th celebration the most meaningful yet. We can't wait to see you there!

Prevent colon cancer with screenings

COLONOSCOPY SCREENINGS SAVE LIVES by preventing colon cancer. Currently, colon cancer is the third leading cause of cancer but second leading cause of cancer deaths.

St. Luke Community Healthcare Physician Dr. Zach Hovorka points out that with proper screenings, up to 90-95% of colon cancer can be prevented.

Current guidelines to start screenings are age 45 for average people or ten years earlier than a first degree relative was diagnosed at. Screening recommendations now extend to age 84 due to people living longer. Due to an increase in colon cancer rates among younger individuals, Dr. Hovorka believes the 45-year guideline to begin screenings is likely to change at some point in the near future.

“For the average person I would recommend starting your screenings at age 45,” he said. “Any family history of colon cancer should be a reason to discuss earlier cancer screening dates or shorter screening intervals.”

The process, he explains, is relatively straight forward, and there are options. “The best and most comprehensive screening is the colonoscopy, as it allows for both diagnosis and treatment all in one,” he said. “Other options are stool-based studies, which usually test for blood or abnormal DNA in the stool sample. Usually, you collect a stool sample and send it to a lab for analysis. One problem with this approach is that if positive you still need a colonoscopy and sometimes it will not be fully covered by insurance.”

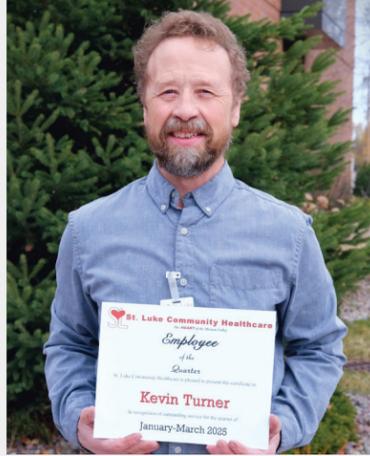
For the colonoscopy process, a patient drinks a prep to clean out the colon. They then come in the following day, have an IV started, drift off to sleep and the colonoscopy is performed. The procedure usually lasts less than 30 minutes, after which the patient awakens. There’s usually no pain or discomfort, sometimes mild bloating or cramping. Many are able to leave 30-45 minutes later and go out for breakfast or lunch after the procedure.

EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

Quarter 2:

Kevin Turner, Maintenance / DME

KEVIN ALWAYS GOES OUT OF HIS WAY to help out even when he is busy with something else. He is consistently courteous, professional, and pleasant with everyone he interacts with. Kevin keeps a close eye on things, performing repairs and maintenance often without being asked. He is truly an asset to St. Luke!



MUSCLE MATTERS

Adequate protein intake, resistance training boost GLP-1 success

MAINTAINING MUSCLE MASS DURING WEIGHT LOSS is important and requires a combination of proper protein intake and resistance training.

GLP-1 medications can significantly suppress appetite which can lead to insufficient protein intake, explains Kyota Shizuku, a physical therapist with St. Luke Community Healthcare – Ridgewater. “It is generally recommended to consume at least 1 gram of protein per pound of body weight, unless contraindicated (e.g., renal disease),” he said.

Adding resistance training two to three times per week should sufficiently promote muscle maintenance and development. To ensure safe and effective weight loss, healthcare providers may recommend proper assessment of body compositions such as lean body mass, fat mass, hydration status, bone density via bioimpedance or DEXA. Multiple studies report that up to 20-40% of weight loss may come from lean body mass if no precautions are taken among people on GLP-1 medications.

Other populations most vulnerable to muscle loss include adults over age 60 (due to sarcopenia risk), female population (post-menopausal over mid 40’s to 50’s) and people with sedentary lifestyles.

While both resistance and cardio training bring multiple health benefits, it is recommended to prioritize resistance training for maintaining and building muscle as it is proven to promote the neuromechanical stimulus for muscle growth. It should be noted, however, a combined approach (resistance training 3x per week and cardio training 2-3 x per week) may bring the best overall outcome for



ENVATO PHOTO

metabolic health.

Maintaining muscle mass is critical for physical mobility and function, metabolic health for blood glucose control and insulin sensitivity and for long term weight management by preserving a healthy resting metabolic rate, which accounts for 60 to over 70% of our daily energy expenditure.

“People with more muscle mass may experience improved physical function and mobility while maintaining metabolic health, and therefore, achieve more effective weight loss,”

Shizuku said. “I believe weight loss with GLP-1s can bring a promising result for certain population groups. Based on our current understanding of safe and effective weight loss with GLP-1s, it is vital to approach this in the most comprehensive manner by educating yourself for informed decision making while engaging with primary care providers, RDN/RN, PT, and other healthcare specialists such as endocrinologists, cardiologists, and gastroenterologists if appropriate.”

PROVIDER DIRECTORY

St. Luke Community Clinic – Ronan Family Medicine and Obstetrics

406-676-3600

Joanna Billings, DO
John Foster, MD
Jay Perret, DO
Megan Vigil, MD
Ed Vizcarra, MD
Peggy Martino, NP-C
Katherine Mitchell, NP-C
Stacey Burdett, NP

St. Luke Community Clinic – Ridgewater Family Medicine and Obstetrics

406-883-3737

Isaac Billings, DO
Kelli Larson, DO
Mike Schallock, PA-C
Jamie Engeldrum, PA-C
Katie Troxel, DNP, FNP-C

St. Luke Community Clinic – Southshore Family Medicine and Obstetrics

406-883-2555

Christina Marchion, MD
Tanner Staley, PA-C

St. Luke Community Clinic – St. Ignatius Family Medicine and Obstetrics

406-745-2781

Joanna Billings, DO
Simon Crawford, PA-C
Steve Shepro, PA-C
Stacey Burdett, NP

St. Luke Community Orthopedics

406-528-5580

Michael Dolecki, MD
Robert Alfiero, PA-C

St. Luke Community General Surgery

406-676-3600

Zach Hovorka, DO
Jesse Alfiero, PA-C

COUNSELING / PSYCHOLOGY

Lyssa Haase, PsyD Mikel Baxter, LCSW
406-676-3600 406-676-3600

Rick Greene, LCSW
406-676-3600

EMERGENCY ROOM

Abi Nutt, MD Phillip Anuta, DO
Darren Brockie, MD Cara Harrop, MD
Ben Grass, MD Alex Nutt, MD
Mark Harding, MD John VanArendonk, MD

SPECIALIST DIRECTORY

INDEPENDENT SPECIALISTS PROVIDING SERVICES WITH ST. LUKE COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

Cardiology

Morgan Kellogg, MD
406-327-4646

Matt Weiss, MD
406-327-4646

Douglas Waldo, MD
406-327-4646

Robert Minor, MD
406-327-4646

Ear, Nose and Throat

Kyle Tubbs, MD
406-752-8330

Kent Keele, DO
406-752-8330

Psychiatry

Eleanore Hobbs, MD
406-676-3600

Radiology

Northwest Imaging
406-676-4441

Sleep Medicine

Kim Damrow, MD
406-676-4441

Maternal Fetal Medicine

M. Bardett Fausett, MD
406-676-4441

Interventional Pain

Michael Dumouchel,
DNP, CRNA, NSPM-C
Anthony Young, MAE,
NSPM-F, CRNA
406-676-4441

ECF PROFILE: Verna Drowatzky

BORN AT HOME IN RONAN, MONTANA on November 21st, 1930, Verna Drowatzky will celebrate her 95th birthday this year. The daughter of a Polish father and Salish mother, Verna was raised on a small farm in the North Crow area with her four siblings—Gene, Jack, Glenna, and Donnie. She recalls a childhood full of simple joys—playing in the country, helping care for livestock, and working in the family garden. She also fondly remembers riding along in her father’s Texaco truck and hearing stories of his work helping to construct Kerr Dam, where his initials are still stamped in the concrete. Of the five siblings, Verna and her youngest brother, Donnie, are the last ones surviving. Gene, Jack, and Glenna have all passed.

Verna attended school in Ronan, where she met her first husband, “Swede.” Though she left school in her sophomore year to begin working, Verna never lost sight of her goals. She married Swede in 1949 at age 19, had her first child at 21, and later went on to earn her GED at the age of 49—an accomplishment she was especially proud of. In the early 1950s, Verna also attended barber college in Eugene, Oregon, setting the stage for her future as a small business owner.

Together, Verna and Swede had seven children: Danny, Randy, Mike, Diana, Henry, Freddy, and Carey. Mike passed away in 1971 at just 17 years old, following a car accident near Ronan. Freddy died in 2016, and Diana passed in 2023. Carey visits regularly and often takes Verna on outings to visit other family members. After divorcing Swede in the 1970s, Verna spent over a decade with her second partner, Jerry Sias. Together they adopted another child, Gerri, and she became the youngest sibling of the family. Verna and Jerry also ran Sias Kitchen in Pablo during the late 1970s. Verna eventually chose a life of independence and remained single from 1984 onward, but continued a friendship with Jerry until he passed away in 2004.

Over the years, Verna developed what she told her children were “itchy feet” and moved the family several times - including to Tucson, AZ, and Las Vegas, NV - but they always found their way back to the Flathead Reservation. Verna opened barber shops in Charlo and later in Ronan (the latter located where Dino Mart stands today). She never shied away from a new adventure, and her family lovingly remembers her love of variety and new sights.

No matter her other passions, Verna’s greatest joy in life has always been her role as a mother. Her children remember her as a “fun mom,” who let them explore, encouraged their creativity, and made ordinary moments magical—like climbing into bed to read comic books and doing all the voices. “She had the best voice for Casper,” Carey shared. “And Hot Stuff too!” An avid photographer, Verna always had her camera at the ready, and she still keeps her albums close. She also enjoyed beading and sold her handmade jewelry—including porcupine quill earrings—at local shops.

In 1984, Verna returned to Montana and eventually settled in Arlee, where she lived until 2021. She and Carey had long discussed her desire to spend her later years at St. Luke Extended Care Facility—where Verna’s mother had also lived. After a long wait and thoughtful consideration, Verna signed herself in during the COVID-19 pandemic, saying simply that she was “ready to be taken care of.” Now a vibrant resident at ECF, Verna is known for her social spirit and helpful nature. She participates in nearly every activity, from bingo and live music to games and outdoor walks in nicer weather. She especially loves westerns—John Wayne movies are her favorite—and she once owned every film he made. She also enjoys puzzles and keeps track of her solitaire wins and losses with pride.

Nearing centenarian territory, Verna is full of life and wisdom. She lives by the motto her mother taught her: “*God will provide.*” A woman of simple pleasures, she’s proud of her resilience—she never smoked or drank, she kept up with eight children, and still doesn’t need a wheelchair – a fact she is mighty proud of. When asked what advice she would give others, Verna doesn’t hesitate: “Raise your children right. Teach them to do the right thing. I did that—and I loved being a mom because of it.” Verna’s legacy is a powerful one. According to Carey, she has 31 grandchildren, more than 70 great-grandchildren, and at least five great-great-grandchildren. Her story is a beautiful reminder of the strength of family, the joy of a mother’s love, and the lasting impact of a life well-lived.



Verna Drowatzky, today



Verna Drowatzky, past

NUTRITION CORNER



Healthy weight loss while on obesity medication: A Balanced Approach

SEMAGLUTIDE (OZEMPIC, WEGOVY, RYBELSUS) HAS GAINED WIDESPREAD ATTENTION for its effectiveness in aiding weight loss, particularly among individuals with type 2 diabetes or obesity. While it can be a powerful tool, healthy weight loss still requires a thoughtful, balanced approach to maximize benefits and support long-term health and wellness.

Understanding Semaglutide

Semaglutide is a GLP-1 receptor agonist originally designed to improve blood sugar control in people with type 2 diabetes. These medications may suppress appetite due to delayed gastric emptying (food staying in your stomach for longer) which often leads to weight loss. However, relying solely on the medication without lifestyle changes can limit results and may cause unwanted side effects, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and constipation.

1. Focus on Nutrition, Not Just Calories

Obesity medications can promote weight loss by decreasing hunger and food cravings, and increasing feelings of fullness. It’s important to eat nutrient-dense meals and snacks, especially since you may not be able to tolerate large portions. Nutrient-dense foods are key to preserving energy and muscle mass during weight loss. Here are some meal planning tips:

Choose a variety of fiber-rich foods, such as vegetables, fruits, and whole-grains

Eat protein foods with each meal and snack, such as beans, peas, lentils, seafood, eggs, and soy products

Add small amounts of healthy fats, such as avocado, nuts, seeds, olive oil, and limit fried and greasy foods

Limit ultra-processed foods, sugar-sweetened beverages, alcohol, and caffeinated beverages

If you are experiencing side effects, it can be helpful to avoid strong smells and flavors, and drink ginger tea or suck on a lozenge

2. Eat Mindfully

Because these medications slow digestion, eating too quickly or too much can lead to nausea or discomfort. Take your time, eat smaller portions, and stop when you’re comfortably full. It’s also important to note that you may not always feel hunger and this may cause you to skip meals, but it’s important to eat, so it can be helpful to set scheduled times to eat meals and snacks. Keeping a food journal can help you track how different meals make you feel and identify trigger foods.

3. Stay Hydrated

Dehydration can intensify side effects like headaches, fatigue, and constipation. Sip water consistently throughout the day—especially important since reduced appetite might make you forget to drink. Drink at least 48-64 ounces (6-8 cups) daily.



Mackenzie Stark, RDN

4. Exercise for Strength and Stability

Exercise is crucial for maintaining muscle, improving mood, and supporting metabolism during weight loss. Focus on:

Strength training: 2–3 times per week to preserve lean muscle

Cardio: brisk walking, biking, or swimming

Flexibility and balance: yoga or stretching routines

Start slowly if you’re new to exercise and build up as your energy improves.

5. Track Progress Beyond the Scale

Semaglutide can cause rapid weight loss, but the number on the scale isn’t the only marker of success. Track:

– How your clothes fit

– Energy levels

– Blood sugar and cholesterol improvements

– Sleep quality and mood

These are just as important for long-term health and wellness.

6. Work With a Professional

Consult your healthcare provider regularly to monitor your progress. A registered dietitian nutritionist can help build a meal plan that works with semaglutide and your individual needs. If you experience side effects like nausea or fatigue, they can help you adjust your approach.

7. Prioritize Mental Health

Weight loss journeys—especially ones involving medication—can bring up emotional challenges. Don’t hesitate to seek mental health support. Therapy, meditation, and journaling can help you stay grounded and focused.

Final Thoughts

Obesity medications can be a highly effective weight loss aid, but it’s not a shortcut. The healthiest—and most sustainable—results come when it’s paired with smart nutrition, physical activity, and mindful habits. Think of these medications as a tool, not the whole toolbox. With the right balance, you can lose weight safely while gaining energy, strength, and confidence.



www.stlukehealthcare.org

IN RONAN:

St. Luke Community Hospital
St. Luke Community Convenient Care
St. Luke Community Extended Care
St. Luke Community Oxygen & Medical Equipment
St. Luke Community Hearing Center
St. Luke Community Healthcare Foundation
107 6th Ave. SW 406-676-4441
St. Luke Community Clinic – Ronan 406-676-3600
St. Luke Orthopedic Clinic 406-528-5580
St. Luke General Surgery 406-676-3600
126 6th Ave. SW

IN POLSON:

St. Luke Community Clinic – Ridgewater 406-883-3737
St. Luke Community Clinic – Ridgewater PT 406-883-2666
107 Ridgewater Drive
St. Luke Community Clinic – Southshore 406-883-2555
104 Rufus Lane

IN ST. IGNATIUS:

St. Luke Community Clinic – St. Ignatius 406-745-2781
330 Six Tracts Way

**The Heart of Healthcare
in the Mission Valley**

