

Side Effects and When to Seek Help

Know what may be expected and what needs action

Use this guide as a safety companion

Weight-loss injections can cause side effects, particularly when treatment begins or the dose changes. Some are common and manageable; others require prompt or emergency assessment. Side effects are not proof that a medicine is working, and nobody should feel expected to suffer in silence.

Four levels of response

EXPECTED Monitor and use agreed self-care.	CONTACT Ask the prescriber for advice.
URGENT Seek same-day clinical help.	EMERGENCY Use emergency services now.

Always follow the medicine leaflet and your prescriber’s individual instructions. If you are unsure how serious something is, ask for help rather than waiting.

Expected or common effects

Nausea, constipation, diarrhoea, vomiting, abdominal discomfort, bloating, reflux, reduced appetite, headache, tiredness and injection-site reactions can occur. They are often strongest at the beginning or after a dose increase, but experiences differ.

Supportive measures to discuss

- Eat slowly and stop when comfortably full. Smaller regular meals may be easier than large meals.
- Drink regularly; reduced appetite may also quieten thirst or usual routines.
- Increase fibre gradually and only alongside enough fluid.
- Avoid assuming that rich, high-fat or very large meals will be tolerated as before.
- Keep a simple record of dose, food, fluids, bowel changes and symptoms.

Contact the prescriber if

- Symptoms are persistent, worsening or interfering with eating, drinking, sleep or daily activity.
- Constipation does not improve, becomes painful or is accompanied by marked swelling.
- You feel weak, dizzy or unable to meet basic nutritional needs.
- Side effects return strongly with every dose or increase.

Do not chase side effects

More nausea does not mean more fat loss. Never increase the dose early or remain on an intolerable dose simply to lose weight faster.

Dehydration and inadequate nourishment

Vomiting, diarrhoea and very low intake can cause dehydration. Risk may be greater in hot weather, during illness, for older adults and for people taking medicines that affect fluid balance or kidney function.

Possible dehydration signs

- Very dark urine, urinating much less than usual or being unable to pass urine.
- Dry mouth, marked thirst, headache, dizziness or faintness.
- Unusual sleepiness, confusion, weakness or a racing heartbeat.
- Repeated vomiting or inability to keep fluids down.

Food still matters when appetite is quiet

The body continues to need energy, protein, fluids, fibre, vitamins and minerals. Very low intake may contribute to fatigue, constipation, nutritional deficiencies, gallstones and loss of muscle. People with allergies, intolerances, ARFID or a restricted range of safe foods may need early dietetic support.

Seek prompt advice

Contact the prescriber or an urgent clinical service if you cannot maintain fluids, have repeated vomiting, feel faint or show signs of significant dehydration. Severe collapse, confusion or breathing difficulty is an emergency.

Abdominal pain: when it needs assessment

Abdominal symptoms range from mild digestive discomfort to conditions needing urgent treatment. Do not diagnose the cause yourself or assume severe pain is a normal medicine effect.

Pancreatitis warning

Severe, persistent abdominal pain—particularly pain that may spread through to the back—with or without vomiting requires urgent medical assessment. Stop following social-media advice and contact an appropriate urgent service or emergency care as directed by your medicine leaflet.

Gallbladder concerns

Rapid weight loss can increase gallstone risk. Upper abdominal pain, fever, yellowing of the skin or eyes, pale stools or dark urine require medical advice. Symptoms may have causes unrelated to the injection, which is another reason proper assessment matters.

Bowel obstruction or severe slowing

Severe or increasing abdominal pain, a very swollen abdomen, persistent vomiting, and being unable to pass stool or wind need urgent assessment. Do not keep treating these symptoms only with home remedies.

Emergency principle

Sudden severe pain, collapse, confusion, blue or grey lips, severe breathing difficulty or rapidly worsening illness: call 999 or attend emergency care. Do not drive yourself if you are seriously unwell.

Allergy, blood glucose and other concerns

A severe allergic reaction can involve swelling of the lips, mouth, tongue or throat, breathing or swallowing difficulty, wheezing, sudden collapse or a widespread rapidly developing rash. Call 999 immediately.

Low blood glucose

The risk is especially relevant when an injection is combined with insulin or medicines such as sulfonylureas. Symptoms may include sweating, shaking, hunger, confusion, palpitations or drowsiness. Follow the diabetes team's treatment plan and discuss repeated episodes promptly.

Vision, mood and pregnancy

- Report sudden or significant changes in vision promptly, especially if you have diabetes or known eye disease.
- Tell the prescriber about marked mood changes, severe distress, disordered eating or thoughts of harming yourself; urgent mental-health support may be required.
- Weight-loss medicines are not used during pregnancy. If pregnancy occurs or is suspected, contact the prescriber promptly for medicine-specific advice.
- Never rely on internet advice about contraception interactions; follow current instructions for the exact medicine and dose schedule.

Medicine-specific information

Risks and instructions vary between semaglutide, liraglutide and tirzepatide. Read the current patient leaflet supplied with your own medicine and use the contact details given by your prescriber.

Side-effect and action tracker

Use this record for routine monitoring and clinical reviews. Do not delay urgent care in order to complete it.

Date/dose	Symptom and severity	Food/fluids	Action/outcome

My action plan

Prescriber/contact: _____

Out-of-hours advice: _____

Nearest urgent care route: _____

Emergency contact: _____

Questions for review

Is my dose still appropriate? What can I do safely for these symptoms? Do other medicines need review? Am I eating and drinking enough? What exact signs mean I should stop the medicine or seek urgent help?

Personal perspective and message from Maggie

“I expected some nausea and assumed I simply had to tolerate it. When I began struggling to drink and felt dizzy, I realised that calling for advice was not making a fuss. My dose needed reviewing and I needed a proper plan for fluids and regular nourishment. Side effects were information—not a test of how determined I was.”

A message from Maggie

Please do not measure your commitment by how much discomfort you can endure. You deserve clear advice and responsive care. Report what is happening honestly, even if you worry that treatment might be changed or stopped.

Protecting your health is the priority. Ask questions, keep emergency guidance accessible and trust yourself when something feels significantly wrong. Medication should support your life—not ask you to ignore your body.

Clinical notes and sources

NHS: Overweight and obesity in adults. UK overview of weight-management medicines and lifestyle support. Updated April 2026. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/overweight-and-obesity/>

Electronic Medicines Compendium. Current UK patient leaflets and professional product information for medicine-specific effects and precautions. <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/>

MHRA Yellow Card. Patients and professionals can report suspected medicine side effects. <https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>

Important

This guide provides general information and cannot determine how serious an individual symptom is. Follow your medicine leaflet and prescriber’s advice. Call NHS 111 for urgent advice when appropriate and 999 for a life-threatening emergency.