

Weight loss medications and anaesthetic

There are two classes of weight-loss medicines: GLP-1 RAs and GIP agonists. These may have been prescribed by your GP but are also available with a private prescription:

- **GLP-1 RAs** (receptor agonists) include semaglutide (Ozempic, Wegovy) and liraglutide (Victoza).
- **GIP agonists** include tirzepatide (Mounjaro).

These medicines are commonly used to manage Type 2 diabetes and assist with weight loss. They work by imitating a natural hormone called GLP-1, which helps control blood sugar levels and appetite.

We will refer to both types of medications as GLP-1 medicines throughout this leaflet.

Important

You must tell your anaesthetist and surgical team if you are taking any brand of GLP-1 medicine, even if it is prescribed privately – for example, Mounjaro, Ozempic, Wegovy and Victoza.

These medicines can affect how your body responds to anaesthesia. They may **increase certain risks** during the surgical process.

Anaesthetic risks

Gastrointestinal side effects

Gastric aspiration during anaesthesia is a small risk, but it can lead to:

- Aspiration pneumonia (infection and inflammation of your lungs).
- Airway obstruction leading to difficulty in breathing.
- Hypoxia (low oxygen levels) in your blood.
- Longer recovery and hospital admission, and increased risk of complications.
- Death (caused by airway obstruction and respiratory failure); this is **rare**.

Increased risk of low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia)

GLP-1 medicines can lower your blood sugar levels. When combined with fasting before surgery or with other medicines, the risk of hypoglycaemia can increase.

Preparing for surgery

If you take GLP-1 medicines, to prepare for surgery do the following:

- **Inform the Preoperative Assessment Team** - Let them know you are taking GLP-1 medicines. They will offer guidance on how to manage your medicine around the time of surgery.
- **Do not adjust your medicine** - In most cases you should continue your GLP-1 medicine as usual before and after surgery. If you need to skip a dose, we will explain this to you at your preop assessment appointment.
- **Follow fasting instructions** - It is important to follow the advice that the Preoperative Assessment Team gives you about when to stop eating and drinking before surgery.

What to expect on the day of surgery

You can expect the following on the day of surgery:

- **Tell your anaesthetist if you are taking GLP-1 medicines.**
- Tell them if you have recently started your GLP-1 medicines or adjusted your dose.
- Your anaesthetist will review your medical history and may adjust your anaesthetic plan based on the medicines you take, including GLP-1 medicines. They will discuss this with you.

Useful contact details

East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust:

- Website www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk
- Telephone 01438 314333

Preoperative Assessment Service:

- Telephone 01438 288134
- Email - Preopassessment.enh-tr@nhs.net

Leaflet information

Reference: Adapted with permission from Kingston and Richmond NHS Foundation Trust's leaflet

You can request this information in a different format or another language; please speak to your doctor or nurse.

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