

Semaglutide for weight management in children

Information for children, families and carers

We have given you this factsheet because your child's doctor has recommended that they start a medication called semaglutide to help manage their weight. It explains what semaglutide is, and what the potential benefits and risks of taking it are. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our team.

What is semaglutide?

Semaglutide (also known by the brand names, Ozempic® and Wegovy®) is a medication that is used for weight management in children and adults. It is also used for management of type 2 diabetes in adults.

How does semaglutide work?

After eating, your child's body produces a hormone called glucagon-like peptide 1 (GLP-1). This hormone sends signals to their brain and stomach to make them feel full.

Semaglutide is a protein that mimics the action of the hormone GLP-1, but to a stronger degree. It works slowly around the day to make your child feel less hungry. If taken over a long period of time, semaglutide will alter your child's appetite and they will feel full more quickly after having a meal or a snack, which will result in weight loss.

Semaglutide will also cause your child's body to produce extra amounts of insulin during mealtimes. This will reduce the high blood sugar levels that can happen after a meal, which will lower your child's risk of developing diabetes in the future.

What are the benefits of semaglutide?

In children and young people, semaglutide can:

- reduce their feelings of hunger
- alter their appetite to make them feel full more quickly after meals and snacks

- prevent high blood sugar levels after meals
- help with weight loss over time

In adults, semaglutide can:

- prevent the development of heart diseases due to excess weight
- reverse early signs of fatty liver disease
- help prevent prediabetes turning into diabetes

Are there any risks or side effects?

Semaglutide is very well tolerated by most children and young people. However, as with all medications, there are some potential side effects, including:

- stomach-ache
- diarrhoea (your child should take lots of small sips of water to keep hydrated)
- nausea (feeling sick)
- vomiting (being sick)
- heartburn (acid reflux)
- fatigue (feeling tired)

These side effects are common when children first start taking semaglutide, but they tend to settle down after a few weeks. To help ease these side effects, we recommend that your child follows the advice below for the first few weeks:

- your child should eat smaller portions
- your child should slowly increase their dose of semaglutide (according to their doctor's instructions) to allow their body time to adapt to the medication

There are also a few rare side effects of semaglutide, including:

- gallstones (small stones, usually made of cholesterol, that form in the gallbladder)
- inflammation of the gallbladder
- acute pancreatitis (a condition where the pancreas becomes swollen over a short period of time)

These rare side effects are mostly seen in adults who have other health conditions. Your child's doctor will assess your child's own risks before they start taking the medication. This assessment may include your child having an ultrasound scan (a procedure that uses high-frequency sound waves to create an image of part of the inside of the body).

If after starting semaglutide your child starts to experience a strong tummy pain that won't go away, you should stop the semaglutide injections and contact us for advice. If your child's symptoms are severe, take your child to your nearest emergency department or call **111** for advice straight away.

How is semaglutide given?

Pre-filled injection pens

Semaglutide comes in the form of pre-filled injection pens. Please be aware that there are different brands of semaglutide (Ozempic® and Wegovy®), each with its own pen device and doses. To make sure your child receives the correct medication, always check that the brand you receive from your pharmacy is the brand you expected.

We will show you and your child how to use the injection pens. If your child is prescribed Ozempic®, click the link below to watch a video on how to use the injection pen:

www.ozempic.com/how-to-take/ozempic-pen.html

Doses

Your child will need to have one injection of semaglutide a week.

Your child will start at a dose of 0.25mg of semaglutide a week. Your child's doctor will then gradually increase their dose every four weeks to the maximum dose. Your child's doctor will discuss this dosing plan with you in more detail.

Each pen comes with a pre-set dose that you cannot change, so make sure you always have the correct dose written on the pen before injecting.

Time of injection

Semaglutide doesn't need to be given with meals. We recommend picking a day and time that are easy to remember, and then giving your child their injection every week at this time.

Injection sites

The medication needs to be injected into the subcutaneous (fatty) layer of your child's skin. The best injection sites are your child's:

- tummy (at least 5cm away from their tummy button)
- thighs (at the front)

Make sure you choose a different place to inject into each time. Do not inject into the same place twice in a row. This is called 'injection site rotation' and ensures your child's skin remains healthy after each injection.

Missed doses

If your child misses a dose, **do not** double up on the dose the next week. If you remember the missed dose within five days of the usual day, you can still give your child their injection, then give the next dose on the scheduled day as usual. However, if more than five days have passed, skip that dose and give your child their next dose on the scheduled day.

Storage

Unopened pens should be stored in a refrigerator. Once opened, keep the pen in a refrigerator or at room temperature for up to six weeks (if you are using Ozempic®) or up to three weeks (if you are using Wegovy®). It can be useful to keep the pen by your bedside or in a place that reminds you to give your child their injection every week.

Metformin

If your child is taking metformin (another medication used in weight management), they should continue taking metformin alongside semaglutide. The combined effect of these two medications is stronger than each of them alone.

How should I dispose of used equipment?

Your child will receive a regular supply of pens from your local hospital with each prescription. We will ask your child's GP to issue you with a sharps bin when your child starts treatment, and whenever you need a replacement bin in the future.

If your child is prescribed Ozempic®, the package comes with its own needles. If your child is prescribed Wegovy®, the pens are preloaded with a hidden needle.

Item	How to dispose of it
Empty Ozempic® pens	These can be disposed of in your regular household waste (they are not yet recyclable).
Empty Wegovy® pens	These should be discarded in a sharps bin.
Any pens that still contain medication	These should be returned to your local pharmacy for safe disposal.
Needles	These should be discarded in a sharps bin. Your local council can arrange disposal of the sharps bin when full, and you can request a referral from your child's GP or local hospital team to arrange this.

Is there anything else my child needs to do when taking semaglutide?

Although semaglutide will reduce your child's body fat, it is important that they continue to have a healthy balanced diet and exercise regularly to help build muscle and maintain their body weight.

Your child should also keep hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids. This will help reduce their feelings of hunger, but it will also replace any fluids they lose from the early side effects of semaglutide (such as diarrhoea).

Contraception and pregnancy

The effects of semaglutide on an unborn baby are unknown. If your child is sexually active, we advise that they use suitable contraception to prevent pregnancy. For more information on contraception, speak to your child's doctor or nurse. If you know or think that your child might be pregnant, please contact us for advice as soon as possible.

How long will my child need to take semaglutide for?

Your child will need to take semaglutide until they reach their target weight (this will be agreed with their doctor). How long this takes will be different for each child.

Some children who manage to lose a significant amount of weight are able to stop taking semaglutide without gaining weight back, as their metabolism has permanently changed. However, other children who stop taking semaglutide after losing weight may then gain some of this weight back. Your child's doctor will discuss an individual plan for your child with you.

How do I order more semaglutide?

When your child only has one month's supply of semaglutide left (one pen of Ozempic® or four pens of Wegovy®), please contact your local hospital to order a repeat prescription. If your local hospital is Southampton Children's Hospital, please contact us by phone or email to order a repeat prescription. You will be given the option to collect your child's prescription from our outpatient pharmacy or have it delivered to your home address.

Further information

For further information, please contact your child's healthcare professional or GP.

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/obesity/treatment

www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well

www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-guidelines/physical-activity-guidelines-children-and-young-people

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrenshospital

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