

SEMAGLUTIDE injection (Wegovy[®] ▼) for managing overweight and obesity

The Cheshire and Merseyside Interim Area Prescribing Group does not currently recommend the prescribing of SEMAGLUTIDE injection (Wegovy[®] ▼) for managing overweight and obesity in adults.

GREY

This recommendation will be reviewed when semaglutide (Wegovy[®]) is available to prescribe in the UK.

Background

Semaglutide (Wegovy[®]) is a medicine for weight loss and weight maintenance that contains the active substance semaglutide. It is similar to a natural hormone called glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) that is released from the intestine after a meal. Wegovy[®] works by acting on receptors in the brain that control appetite, causing individuals to feel fuller and less hungry and experience less craving for food. This helps individuals eat less food and reduce body weight. Wegovy[®] should be used with a reduced calorie meal plan and increased physical activity.^[1]

NICE Technology Appraisal (TA) recommendations

[NICE TA875](#) was published on 08 March 2023 and recommends semaglutide (Wegovy[®]) as an option for weight management, including weight loss and weight maintenance, alongside a reduced-calorie diet and increased physical activity in adults, only if:

- > it is used for a maximum of 2 years, and within a specialist weight management service providing multidisciplinary management of overweight or obesity (including but not limited to tiers 3 and 4), **and**
- > they have at least 1 weight-related comorbidity **and**:
 - a body mass index (BMI) of at least 35.0 kg/m², **or**
 - a BMI of 30.0 kg/m² to 34.9 kg/m² and meet the criteria for referral to specialist weight management services in [NICE's guideline on obesity: identification, assessment and management](#).^[2]

Lower BMI thresholds should be used (usually reduced by 2.5 kg/m²) for people from South Asian, Chinese, other Asian, Middle Eastern, Black African or African-Caribbean family backgrounds.^[2]

Availability of semaglutide (Wegovy[®])

- > Although the NICE TA has already been published, the Wegovy[®] brand of semaglutide is not currently available in the UK, and therefore cannot be prescribed.
- > Other brands of semaglutide are available: Ozempic[®] (injection) and Rybelsus[®] (tablets). However, these are only licensed for the treatment of type 2 diabetes and cannot be prescribed for weight management on the NHS.
- > Wegovy[®] is only licensed for use in adults and cannot be prescribed on the NHS for weight management in children and adolescents under 18 years of age.
- > Once Wegovy[®] has been launched in the UK, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside will seek to implement the recommendations in NICE TA875 within 90 days, which is the statutory obligation for NHS organisations for implementing NICE TAs.

Note: Patients who are not eligible for treatment under this statement may be considered on an individual basis where their GP or consultant believes exceptional circumstances exist that warrant deviation from the rule of this policy. In this situation, follow locally defined processes.

Supporting information

Who can prescribe semaglutide (Wegovy®)?

- > As the Wegovy® brand of semaglutide has not been launched in the UK yet it cannot be prescribed at all.
- > When Wegovy® becomes available in the UK it will only be prescribed to adult patients who are under an appropriate NHS specialist weight management service, and will not be prescribed in primary care by GPs.

Private prescribing

- > In addition to NHS prescribing, Wegovy® will also be able to be prescribed through private weight management services once it becomes available in the UK.
- > Private weight management services are not restricted to use only within the NICE TA recommendations and, therefore, may offer semaglutide (Wegovy®) to patients with lower BMI thresholds.
- > Prescribing of Wegovy® that is started privately cannot be continued on the NHS by a GP. Patients would need to meet the criteria stated within the NICE TA and be referred to an NHS specialist weight management service to be assessed for suitability to receive ongoing NHS treatment.

What does this mean for GPs?

- > GPs should not initiate NHS prescribing of Wegovy®.
- > GPs should not prescribe Ozempic® or Rybelsus® as off-label treatment for weight management.
- > Eligible patients will need to be referred to the relevant specialist NHS weight management service to be assessed for suitability for NHS treatment with Wegovy®.
- > GPs cannot continue prescribing Wegovy® if a patient obtains initial treatment through a private prescribing service. The patient would need to meet the criteria stated within the NICE TA and be referred to an NHS specialist weight management service to be assessed for suitability to receive ongoing NHS treatment.

What does this mean for patients?

- > Patients should not ask their GP to prescribe semaglutide for weight management.
- > Patients will need to be assessed to establish if they meet the criteria for referral to a specialist NHS weight management service.
- > The specialist NHS weight management service will then work with individual patients to establish the most appropriate treatment for them, and review their eligibility and suitability to receive semaglutide (Wegovy®).
- > Patients who have been started on semaglutide privately cannot ask their GP to continue prescribing on an NHS prescription. Patients would need to meet the criteria stated within the NICE TA and be referred to an NHS specialist weight management service to be assessed for suitability to receive ongoing NHS treatment.

Why will semaglutide (Wegovy®) only be prescribed by specialist weight management services?

- > Efficacy of semaglutide (Wegovy®) has only been demonstrated when it is used alongside a reduced calorie diet and increased physical activity.^[2]
- > The NICE TA states that semaglutide (Wegovy®) must be used within a specialist weight management service providing multidisciplinary management of overweight or obesity.^[2]

References

1. Novo Nordisk. Package leaflet: Information for the patient, [Wegovy FlexTouch](#), May 2022. Accessed online 28 March 2023.
2. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Technology Appraisal 875; [Semaglutide for managing overweight and obesity](#), 08 March 2023. Accessed online 28 March 2023.