**Are weight loss injectables too good to be true?**

We have had a lot of enquiries in the clinic about the relatively new injectable weight loss medicines that are now available.

The three main brand named medications that you may have heard about are Ozempic, Mounjaro and Wegovy. These were initially developed as treatments for Type 2 Diabetes but were found to cause significant weight loss and are now being prescribed extensively in the private sector for this indication. Unfortunately, at present these cannot be prescribed by your GP for weight loss.

As we are seeing an increasing number of patients using these medications I felt it would be helpful to provide some additional background information. I will try to explain how these drugs work and how they compare to each other.

The main action of these medicines is to make you feel fuller for longer, less hungry and reduce food cravings.

The drugs come in pre-filled, self injector pens which are used weekly, injected under the skin in the upper arms, stomach, thighs or buttocks.

Unfortunately, the medications can cause some side effects, particularly headache, nausea , diarrhoea or constipation, similar to other types of drugs used to treat obesity and diabetes.  In most cases the side effects will go away within a few days to a few weeks, when the body has adjusted to the medication.

Although your GP is unable to prescribe these medications, they may feel it would be beneficial for your to consider using them to support weight loss, particularly if you have failed to lose weight through diet and exercise. If you are unsure you can make an appointment to discuss this further. However, if you do decide to go ahead you should bear in mind the following issues:

* You would require a private prescription for Wegovy, Ozempic or Mounjaro.
* All the major high street pharmacy chains have prescribing specialists who can provide a prescription if they feel it is appropriate.
* There are numerous online pharmacies offering access to these medications.
* Be very careful about where you access these medications; make sure you use legitimate and reputable providers.
* You have to pay for a private prescription if you meet certain criteria for this to be issued.
* You will require an initial assessment and ongoing support which should include specialist weight management support.
* You should also check what specific support services are offered. These should include advice regarding diet and exercise management but there may also be useful extras like free injector pen bins and collection
* Whichever weight loss drug you are prescribed privately, the prescriber will need to follow professional guidelines and consider national advice.
* Currently these medications cost around £100 per month.

People taking Wegovy or Mounjaro typically start to lose weight within two to four weeks of starting the drug.

Patients usually start on a low dose and stay on this for four weeks to allow their bodies to adapt and get used to any side effects. Mild side-effects are common, but there are some less common, serious side effects that have been reported including:

* Pancreatitis
* Gallbladder disease
* Vision issues
* Thyroid cancer
* Mood changes.

These medicines are not recommended for short term use.

Unfortunately, if and when you stop taking these medications you may gain back around two-thirds of the weight lost within a year. It is therefore important, during the weight loss journey, to improve your knowledge around the necessary dietary and lifestyle issues which will support sustained weight loss.

Achieving a healthy weight can be hard nowadays with so many temptations but it does come with many health benefits.  As well as feeling better you will also reduce your risk of cancer, heart disease, hypertension, stroke and kidney disease, amongst others.

Although many people access these medications online, our local pharmacist, Campbell Shimmins at Woodside Pharmacy in Doune can prescribe, monitor and support you to get started on weight loss injectables.

Linda Keay

Practice nurse.