

Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

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Thoughts from Dr. Amy

Taking a Deep Dive into the popular weight-loss drugs, GLP-1 receptor agonists

There has been a tremendous amount of attention about a new “miracle weight loss” drug that is in the category of diabetic meds called GLP-1 agonists. This class of medication is known more colloquially by generic names such as Ozempic, Wegovy, Mounjaro, Trulicity, Victoza, Saxenda and Byetta.

These drugs have been all over the news and social media as well as new medical guidelines in recent months. As these medications become household names, we thought it may be helpful to break down the science of what we know; what we don't know; and the benefits, side effects and long-term implications of their use.

First, it is important to note that this class of medication is not new and has been in use for more than a decade in the treatment of Type 2 Diabetes. At

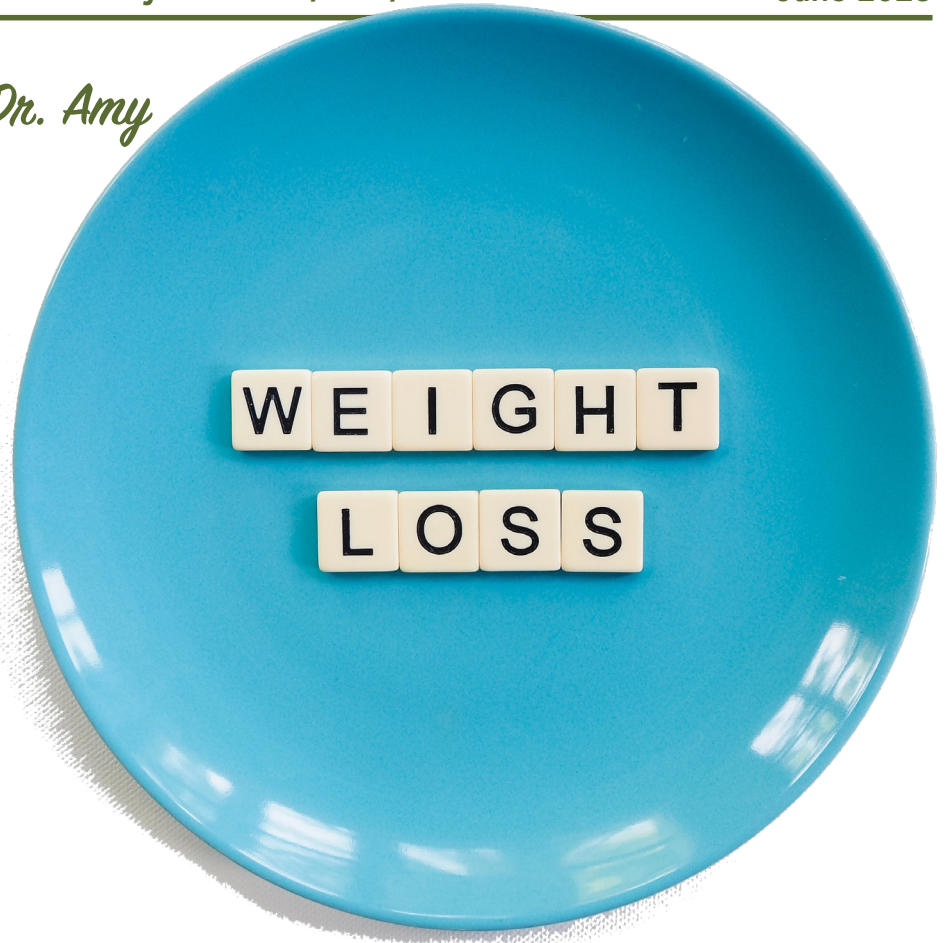
a basic level, GLP-1 agonists work by binding to the GLP-1 receptors in the body, stimulating insulin release from the pancreas, reducing glucose (sugar) release from the liver and thus lowering blood sugar levels. The initial medications in this class were used specifically for Type 2 Diabetes but often caused significant side effects of nausea and constipation, limiting their utility in many patients.

The unwelcome side effects of these medications are not actually side effects at all, rather manifestations of the intended mechanism of action of the

medication. This class of medication leads to significant weight loss in many patients, in part due to their ability to slow the movement of food in the digestive tract, leading to higher levels of satiety earlier in a meal and lower levels of hunger throughout the day. This slowing of the GI tract, while helpful for weight loss and insulin resistance, also causes nausea in many people, as well as understandable constipation.

Renewed interest in this class of medication has recently exploded, due to statistically significant weight loss and the advent of the newer formulations

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Exercising for Cardiometabolic Health with the viral “3-2-8” Method

We all know how important exercise is for maintaining lifelong health and vitality, particularly when it comes to cardiovascular and metabolic health. However, translating this knowledge into action can be extraordinarily challenging, especially at first. That is why our ears perked up when we heard about a “viral” workout method that was garnering a lot of attention on social media: the “3-2-8” method.

The 3-2-8 method essentially breaks down to three easily understood components:

- Three strength or resistance workouts per week
- Two lower impact workouts per week such as yoga, Pilates or barre
- An average of at least 8,000 steps per day

This structure of exercise may seem simplistic, or maybe even too minimal to make a real impact. However, with exercise being such a vital aspect of a healthy lifestyle, any structure that eliminates the plentiful “barriers to entry” is a major win. So why is it that this method of exercise has captured the imagination (and motivation) of many who never previously thought of themselves as healthy or capable of athletic endeavors? The reasoning is multifaceted.

First, this framework allows for a great deal of flexibility on any given day. Don’t feel like lifting weights today? Great, take a 20-minute yoga class from home! Don’t feel like Pilates? Get out on a walk or jog around the neighborhood. Not into running? Excellent, do a 30-minute barre class with a friend. This flexibility results in more days deemed successes than failures, which also bolsters mental health!

Second, no expensive or specific equipment is needed, eliminating a major barrier for many working to incorporate a new exercise practice. Resistance work may consist of weight training, but it can also include air squats, planks, resistance bands or even lifting cans of soup from the pantry. Steps can

include a stair stepper or treadmill, or it can simply be walking around your house or neighborhood. Yoga, Barre and Pilates no longer require expensive memberships to gyms and studios, as a growing abundance of free workouts exist online.

In addition to the reasons people are flocking to this structure of exercise, it is important to note the value of these specific exercise recommendations. The 3-2-8 method is valuable and advisable due to the science behind the exercise types it recommends! The combination of strength building, balance, cardiovascular conditioning, injury prevention, flexibility and stress reduction are a perfect formula for sustainably building the foundation for an active life and improved cardiometabolic health. In addition, we know that regular exercise has been shown to have a positive impact on mental health, which in turn has a positive impact on physical cardiovascular health.

So is the 3-2-8 Method the magic bullet? Of course not. In the long run, it is certainly lacking in the amount of vigorous physical activity recommended by the CDC per week and does not address the fact that vigorous physical activity decreases mortality rates more than low-intensity exercise; but it’s a great place to start. So if you are a person who struggles to get started in an exercise routine, craves structure but not expensive personal training, or simply needs somewhere to start, the 3-2-8 method may be a perfect way to build a strong foundation upon which to build a sustainable exercise routine.

Eating seasonally is one of the great joys in life. Have you ever tried fresh heirloom tomatoes in the absolute height of summer? Freshly picked snap peas off the vine? Strawberries straight out of the field? There is just no comparison, and when it comes to seasonal foods, we think rhubarb takes the cake. Rhubarb season is generally pretty short, but when it pops up in your backyard (or grocery store), it must not be overlooked!

This simple crisp is high in fiber from the oats and rhubarb, healthy fat from the olive oil and walnuts, and protein from almond flour. As a bonus, the cinnamon will help with insulin resistance and this delicious, not too sweet, crisp is unlikely to send blood sugars soaring. Win, win, win.

This crisp can also serve as a lovely breakfast with some plain yogurt (mixed with the juice of that lemon you just zested!)

Ingredients

- 4 cups rhubarb, chopped into ¼ to ½ inch rounds
- 2 cup rolled oats (gluten-free if needed)
- 1 cup walnuts, roughly chopped
- 1 cup almond flour or almond meal
- ¾ cup maple syrup
- ½ cup olive oil
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon salt (optional)



Instructions:

- Chop and arrange rhubarb at the base of a baking dish. Toss with lemon zest.
- In a separate bowl, mix the oats, walnuts, almond flour, maple, olive oil, salt and cinnamon.
- Bake at 350F for 30-35 minutes until golden brown and bubbling.
- Allow to cool for 5-10 minutes, then serve warm.

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like Ozempic, Wegovy and Mounjaro. Of note, Wegovy is the same medication as Ozempic, but with the indication of weight loss, not Type 2 Diabetes.

Adding to the excitement, these newer kids on the block (Ozempic, Wegovy and specifically Mounjaro) seem to have improved upon their formulation to minimize the unwanted side effects that plagued the previous versions. These newer medications boast data for improved weight loss over older formulations (up to 15% of initial body weight with Ozempic), which has sparked interest both from the public and the medical community, leading to further studies with the goal of broadening indications to include weight loss.

So the question we are faced with then, is who will benefit from these medications, and what precautions

must we take when prescribing them?

As you can understand based on the mechanism of action, the people who stand to benefit the most from a GLP-1 agonist are those with clinically significant obesity and insulin resistance or Diabetes. Most people will lose weight while using these medications, but it must be understood that studies demonstrate most people gain back the majority of lost weight following discontinuation of the medication. These medications must be used in conjunction with other lifestyle changes to be successful in the long term, but patients also need to understand that to continue to reap the benefits of this treatment they may need to be willing to take these medications for the foreseeable future.

GLP-1 agonists represent a new and

exciting frontier in the treatment of metabolic disease and obesity and have the potential to be helpful in the management and prevention of cardiovascular disease. However, the side effects, potential need for long-term use and lack of long-term, large-scale data require a pause to determine if this is the best course of action for each individual patient. These meds do not replace the benefit of better-known treatments for insulin resistance and the prevention of diabetes and arterial inflammation reduction. If you have heard of GLP-1 agonists and wonder if they may be a good option for you, a thorough and individualized conversation with your healthcare provider should provide clarity and insight as to the potential benefits for your individual situation.