

Weight Loss Medication + Registered Dietitian Nutritionist = Success



Melissa Herrmann Dierks, RDN, LDN, CDCES
Owner,
Eat Smart Nutrition Co.,
A Credentialed Nutrition Provider for Blue Cross & Blue Shield.



Weight loss medications are a hot topic. There are more effective prescription weight loss drugs available than in the past, and new options are coming soon. Although not every patient of size is a candidate for a weight loss medication, many people who had never been able to achieve a healthy weight are having success for the first time in their adult lives thanks to the new medications. People who start on a weight loss medication often say that they can stop eating when they are full and that the medication helps to decrease food cravings. As patients lose weight, they also experience health gains, such as an improved A1C, which provides additional motivation to continue with their diet and lifestyle changes.

Patients tolerate the medications well overall and typically begin to lose weight fairly quickly. So why would you want to initiate a referral to a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) when you prescribe a weight loss medication? Below are the top five ways that a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist can help your patient on their weight loss journey.

1. Dietitians have tips and tricks to help manage medication side effects. On occasion, patients have nausea or other gastrointestinal side effects from these medications. This typically occurs when patients skip a meal because they aren't hungry. A dietitian can help create a meal plan with appropriate meal times and snacks to minimize side effects.
2. A dietitian can help the patient set a realistic and sustainable goal weight by discussing weight history and current goals. It can be a good idea to help the patient set an initial smaller, realistic weight goal, and then reassess once they reach that weight.
3. Malnutrition can be an issue for people who are skipping meals, or not getting balance in their diet while on weight loss medications. A dietitian can assess current intake to ensure that the patient is getting the nutrients that they need, and provide a plan to correct deficiencies.
4. Patients on weight loss medications often have pre-existing health issues that can be improved with medical nutrition therapy. For example, patients living with diabetes can learn about carbohydrate counting and other meal-planning methods to improve blood sugar. Many people with diabetes and other health issues have never met with a dietitian, even though their insurance covers the service.
5. Nutrition education is the key to long-term success, and a dietitian can teach label reading, how to make a shopping list and plan meals for

the week, how to shop for nutrient-dense foods including tips on food budgeting, provide recipes, and more. Ideas can be provided for quick and healthy meals and snacks that include the patient's favorite and cultural foods. Portion sizes can be discussed, and if the patient reaches a weight loss plateau, a strategy can be implemented to help the patient get back on track with their meal plan. Basic exercise goals can be discussed. Many patients are surprised that walking thirty minutes a day for five days a week will help them reach the goal of 150 minutes of exercise per week. People with joint pain or low endurance can break their thirty-minute walk down into three, ten-minute walks a day. Achievable activity tips help motivate patients to move more.

The good news is that nutrition visits with a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist are often covered at 100% with zero co-pay on managed care plans. Video visits remove barriers to seeing a dietitian on a regular basis since patients don't need to leave their home or office to have a visit unless they prefer an in-person visit. Patients starting on a weight loss medication often see a dietitian weekly or every other week to get started, and then drop down to every three or four weeks, based on their needs. Some people feel that a once-a-month dietitian visit is enough to keep them on track, with the ability to contact the dietitian between visits with questions as needed.

Provide your patients with another tool for success in reaching their health, wellness, and weight loss goals—a referral to a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has a dietitian locator on their website Find a Nutrition Expert (eatright.org), or your patient can call their health plan to find a contracted dietitian near them.