

Access to new weight loss treatment (tirzepatide) on the NHS

Frequently asked questions

1. What is changing in the management of obesity?

People in England over the age of 18 who are living with obesity and another weight-related health issue will be able to access the weight loss drug tirzepatide through specialist weight management services from spring 2025.

In primary care services, access will begin in summer 2025.

Tirzepatide is currently prescribed for the treatment of type 2 diabetes but will now also be available for weight loss purposes.

2. Who can access tirzepatide?

This medication is for people living with obesity who have a body mass index (BMI) of 35 or over and a weight-related health problem, or a BMI of 32.5 and one weight-related health problem for people from South Asian, Chinese, other Asian, Middle Eastern, Black African or African-Caribbean ethnic backgrounds, as they are at a higher risk of medical problems at a lower BMI.

NHS England will provide more information early next year about exactly which weight-related health problems will benefit the most from tirzepatide and which will be eligible for consideration for the medication.

3. Can I access tirzepatide straight away?

Introducing this new treatment to NICE's estimated 3.4 million eligible patients requires the NHS in England to develop a completely new service for primary care and many healthcare professionals will need to be trained to deliver it.

A staged approach will help manage demand on existing healthcare services.

This allows the safe prescribing of tirzepatide and the appropriate support for patients.

Tirzepatide will initially be offered to individuals facing the most significant health risks related to their weight, starting in spring 2025 through specialist weight management services.

Tirzepatide will not immediately be available and will not be accessible to everyone who wishes to use it.

Initially, tirzepatide will only be available on the NHS to those expected to benefit the most.

People who are eligible for tirzepatide through primary care services should only expect to start to get access by mid-2025.

4. What is a staged approach?

A staged approach to service rollout within primary care means NHS in England will manage the flow of patients to the health system so it does not become overwhelmed.

This approach will ensure the service is delivered safely and that the NHS in England is able to plan for an increase in service demand, whilst building specific skills and knowledge within the workforce.

5. How does tirzepatide work for weight loss?

Tirzepatide works by suppressing appetite centres in the brain that control gut hormones. It decreases the appetite and slows the movement of food passing through the body, making patients feel fuller for longer.

Clinical trials have shown tirzepatide can help people living with obesity lose up to 20 per cent of their starting body weight, depending on the dose and accompanying diet and lifestyle support.

Tirzepatide can only be prescribed by a healthcare professional alongside programmes which support people to lose weight and live healthier lives by making changes to their diet and physical activity.

Tirzepatide comes as an injection, which can be self-administered once a week.

6. What if a patient is already receiving tirzepatide treatment?

Patients can continue taking tirzepatide if they are prescribed it to manage their diabetes.

If patients are using tirzepatide they have acquired privately, they may be able to access the medication through an NHS prescription if they meet the NICE and NHS qualifying criteria.

More information about this will be made available in due course.

7. Will everyone who is eligible have access to the drug?

Tirzepatide might not be suitable for everyone and not everyone who meets the eligibility criteria will want to use it to support their weight loss.

A healthcare professional will discuss the most appropriate care and support, based on an individual patient's need.

This could include behavioural support programmes, medical options including prescribing or bariatric surgery.

8. I'm currently on a waiting list for NHS specialist weight management services. Can I transfer to another list to access this drug?

A healthcare professional will determine if it is appropriate for patients to receive tirzepatide as part of their care in a different care setting. For example, through primary care.

9. The NICE announcement mentions wraparound care. What does this mean?

Any patient prescribed tirzepatide must participate in the specifically designed wraparound care required by NICE guidance.

This focuses on diet, nutrition and increasing physical activity.

As NHS England develops the service, it will provide more details of the wraparound support offer for patients who qualify.

Patients cannot be prescribed tirzepatide if they do not wish to undertake the wraparound care support.

10. Will there be a cost to the patient for being prescribed tirzepatide?

Normal prescription charges will apply unless patients are entitled to free NHS prescriptions.