

## Tirzepatide narrative:

# A new treatment option for managing obesity

Obesity is a growing public health concern in England, with around 3 in every 10 (or 29%) of adults are living with obesity (BMI  $\geq 30$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>).<sup>1</sup> The number of people living with obesity continues to rise, driven by multiple factors such as diet, sedentary lifestyles, socioeconomic inequalities and genetic predispositions. Obesity is a complex, chronic relapsing condition for many people and increases the risk of developing several chronic conditions, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers and musculoskeletal disorders,<sup>2</sup> as well as being associated with reduced quality of life and increased mortality rates.

The rising prevalence of obesity imposes a significant economic burden on the NHS and the wider economy, costing the NHS approximately £11.4 billion annually<sup>3</sup>. This figure is projected to increase with rising obesity rates and related comorbidities. Furthermore, the wider societal impact of obesity related ill health costs, such as lost productivity, unemployment and social care, amounts to an estimated £74.3 billion per year.<sup>3</sup> Obesity is associated with reduced workforce participation and social mobility, lower earnings and barriers to career progression, in turn compounding socioeconomic inequalities<sup>4</sup>.

Despite public health initiatives and lifestyle interventions to address the rising prevalence of obesity and associated comorbidities, progress has been slow.<sup>1</sup> For many adults, obesity is a chronic, relapsing condition and while dietary changes, physical activity and behavioural support play a role, achieving and maintaining substantial long term weight loss can be a significant challenge.

In December 2024 the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommended the use of tirzepatide (Mounjaro®), alongside dietary and physical activity guidance, for the treatment of obesity in both specialist weight management services and primary care settings. Previously, NICE advised that similar medications, such as semaglutide (Wegovy®) and liraglutide (Saxenda®), should be used only within specialist services. The inclusion of tirzepatide as a treatment option in primary care, presents an opportunity to expand access and offer new treatments for people living with obesity.

Introducing this new treatment to NICE's estimated 3.4 million eligible patient cohort, requires the NHS in England to develop a completely new service for weight management and train many healthcare professionals to deliver it. A staged approach will help manage the impact on existing healthcare services, ensuring tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) is prescribed safely and that patients receive appropriate support.

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<sup>1</sup> NHS England. (2024). Health Survey for England, 2022 Part 2. Available at:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/dataand-information/publications/statistical/health-survey-for-england/2022-part-2>

<sup>2</sup> Fruh, S. (2017). Obesity: Risk factors, complications, and strategies for sustainable long-term weight management. Journal of the American Association for Nurse Practitioners. 29: 3-14. Available at: 10.1002/2327-6924.12510

<sup>3</sup> Office for Life Sciences, Department of Health & Social Care, and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. (2024). Obesity Healthcare Goals. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/life-sciences-healthcare-goals/obesity-healthcare-goals>

<sup>4</sup> Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. (2025) Public health profiles. Available at: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/>.

## **How tirzepatide works**

The medication tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) is a GLP-1 receptor agonist combined with a GIP receptor agonist. Tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) mimics the gut hormones GLP-1 and GIP which are released by the body after eating, telling the brain you are full; it also slows down the time it takes the stomach to empty. Other medications such as semaglutide (Wegovy ®) and liraglutide (Saxenda ®), known as GLP-1 receptor agonists, work in a similar way.

Tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) 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.

These drugs can also be prescribed on the NHS to treat diabetes by helping control blood sugar levels and help improve diabetes and other health conditions.

## **Access and eligibility**

There are two settings where tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) may be prescribed on the NHS, these are specialist weight management services and primary care. It is important to consider that tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) might not be considered the most appropriate treatment option for eligible people and not everyone who meets the eligibility criteria will want to use drug therapies to support their weight loss.

Patients should speak to a healthcare professional about the best treatment option available to them, in their area. The healthcare professional will review relevant aspects of their medical history and current health conditions and discuss whether tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) is suitable, as well as going through other NHS available weight management options, such as the [NHS Digital Weight Management Programme](#), [NHS Type 2 Diabetes Path to Remission Programme](#) or the [NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme](#) which are just a few of many existing NHS services.

### Specialist Weight Management Services

Tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) will initially be offered to individuals facing the most significant health risks related to their weight, which started in March 2025, through specialist weight management services (SWMS). A healthcare professional or clinician will discuss all available treatments including very low calorie diets, alternative medications or bariatric surgery to choose the most suitable option for the patient.

### Primary Care

Access via primary care requires a new service to be developed and introduced, to support patients with the diet and physical activity components of care required as part of the treatment. From June 2025 a staged approach to implementing access to tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) in primary care will be phased in. This approach will help manage demand on existing healthcare services and allow appropriate training of healthcare professionals to support the safe prescribing of tirzepatide (Mounjaro®).

To be able to access tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) during the first three years, patients must meet criteria outlined below.

The following five health conditions are the relevant weight related comorbidities:

- type 2 diabetes mellitus
- high blood pressure (hypertension)
- heart disease (cardiovascular disease)
- obstructive sleep apnoea
- abnormal blood fats (dyslipidaemia)

Cohort 1 - will start from 23 June 2025. The cohorts are applicable to primary care.

- At least **four** of the five health conditions listed above plus a BMI of **40** (BMI to be adjusted for ethnicity\*) or more.

Cohort 2 – in addition to the patients in Cohort 1 access to the drug will also be offered to patients meeting the following criteria for year two.

- At least **four** of the five health conditions listed above plus a BMI of **35 – 39.9** (BMI to be adjusted for ethnicity\*).

Cohort 3 – in addition to patients in Cohorts 1 and 2, access to the drug will also be offered to patients meeting the following criteria for year three.

- At least **three** of the five health conditions and a BMI of **40** (BMI to be adjusted for ethnicity\*) or more.

\*Due to an increased risk of health conditions at lower BMI thresholds in these populations, the BMI applied to assess eligibility for tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) must be adjusted by 2.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup> in people from South Asian, Chinese, other Asian, Middle Eastern, Black African or African-Caribbean ethnic backgrounds to ensure equitable clinical prioritisation and access to appropriate treatment.

NICE has committed to reviewing access after year three to evaluate the implementation and delivery of tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) for the management of obesity.

### **Supporting people who are prescribed tirzepatide (Mounjaro®)**

If tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) is considered the most appropriate treatment option, individuals will be provided with wraparound care, the purpose of which is to provide comprehensive, practical and person-centred support to patients embarking on weight loss journeys with pharmacological assistance. This wraparound care should include:

#### **Clinical support:**

- including safe prescribing, monitoring of comorbidities and management of potential drug interactions; and

#### **Behavioural support:**

- to drive sustainable lifestyle change through structured interventions.
- enable patients to develop sustainable behaviours which promote long-term improvements in metabolic health, physical wellbeing and lifestyle.
- support the development of balanced macro and micronutrient dietary habits, supporting improved energy levels, promoting satiety, and moving beyond outdated “eat less, move more” approaches.

- equip patients from various socioeconomic backgrounds with tools to make informed, personalised choices around physical activity, food, self-care and emotional health.

**Special circumstances**

It may not be appropriate to manage some people in primary care, due to the complexity of their needs and because they may need the support of a multidisciplinary care team which can be accessed through Specialist Weight Management Services. This will be dependent on local healthcare guidance, treatment pathways and local commissioning.

**The full range of options**

Tirzepatide (Mounjaro®) is one of many options available to manage weight. The common factor among all options, including weight loss drugs, is a need for a healthy balanced diet and regular physical activity.

In some cases, weight loss drugs may be the catalyst for improving health, alongside changes to diet and levels of activity. The NHS is committed to supporting people living with obesity to improve their health. Tirzepatide represents an important addition to the range of treatments already available.