



5 July 2023

Surgery warning on use of popular weight loss drugs

Anaesthetists are warning people using Ozempic and other similar weight loss drugs that they may be at risk of surgical complications because the drugs slow emptying of the stomach.

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA) says patients who have been using the drugs which include Ozempic (first developed to treat type 2 diabetes) need to be aware of this side effect if they are preparing for an operation.

Specialist anaesthetist Dr Ben Olesnicky, a member of ANZCA's Safety and Quality Committee, says the group of drugs, (called glucagon-like peptide 1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists), can delay emptying of the stomach and this can potentially cause problems for people who have fasted before their operation.

The drugs help the pancreas release the right amount of insulin when blood sugar levels are high. They mimic the actions of a hormone called glucagon-like peptide (GLP). These GLP analogues have several other effects including slowing stomach emptying and reducing appetite.

"We know that these drugs, used to treat diabetes and for weight loss, can delay emptying of the stomach, creating potential safety implications for patients," Dr Olesnicky explains.

"General anaesthesia inhibits the body's normal mechanisms to prevent stomach contents from refluxing back into the mouth and then moving into the lungs (aspiration). Normally, a fasted patient has minimal amounts of stomach contents, but having a full stomach increases the risk of potentially life-threatening aspiration".

Writing in the Winter edition of the *ANZCA Bulletin* Dr Olesnicky says the college is aware of cases involving two patients undergoing endoscopic gastroscopy who still had "significant gastric contents despite adequate fasting."

"In some cases the slowing of stomach emptying can last for up to eight weeks but there is still a lack of evidence as to when gastric emptying returns to normal after a patient stops using the drug," he says.

"The clinical significance of this is poorly understood. It may be prudent to cease these drugs, but consideration needs to be given to the duration of effect and the

lack of evidence concerning when gastric emptying returns to normal following drug cessation.”

For more information or to request interviews please contact ANZCA Media Manager Carolyn Jones on +61 408 259 369 or cjones@anzca.edu.au. Follow us on twitter [@ANZCA](https://twitter.com/ANZCA).