Role of obesity-management medications before and after metabolic bariatric surgery: a systematic review

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Introduction

Metabolic bariatric surgery (MBS) induces weight loss through a complex interplay of mechanisms, including alterations in humoral and neural signals in the gut–brain axis, bile acid metabolism pathways, and gut microbiota[1]. However, weight loss outcomes following MBS are highly variable at the individual level, similar to other modalities for the treatment of obesity[2].

The landscape of obesity treatment is rapidly evolving with the advent of a newer generation of obesity management medications (modern OMMs). These exhibit remarkable weight loss efficacy similar to MBS while maintaining acceptable safety profiles[3]. Since 2005, gastrointestinal peptide-based agents have emerged as essential therapeutic options for managing obesity-related complications, like type 2 diabetes. Among these, glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1RAs) have been widely integrated into the treatment regimens of obesity and diabetes due to their efficacy[4,5]. Currently, liraglutide and semaglutide are the most frequently used GLA-1RAs, but promising new drugs are on the horizon, including tirzepatide, a once-weekly glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide (GIP) and GLP-1 receptor agonist, and other compounds are being evaluated in phase 3 clinical trials[6–8].

OMMs can be integrated into the treatment of patients undergoing MBS through (1) preoperative OMMs administration to optimize patients' health for MBS, (2) postoperative concurrent OMMs usage to enhance overall outcomes regarding additional weight reduction to improve obesity complications, and (3) postoperative OMMs utilization as adjunctive therapy for patients with a suboptimal initial response to MBS (weight loss and remission of obesity-related complications) or recurrent weight gain. This systematic Cutting Edge Review aims to examine current research on OMMs use in patients after MBS.

Methods

A systematic search was performed in Medline (PubMed), EMBASE, Cochrane (CENTRAL), from inception to February 2024 based on the PRISMA on the research questions that included the combined terms (Obesity OR Overweight) AND (Bariatrics OR Bariatric Surgery OR Bariatric Surgical Procedures OR Bariatric Surgical Procedure OR Bariatric Surgeries OR Stomach Stapling OR Gastric Bypass OR Gastroplasty OR Sleeve gastrectomy) AND (Recurrence OR Recurrences OR Recrudescence OR Recrudescences OR Relapse OR Relapses OR Weight gain OR Weight regain OR Insufficient weight loss OR Failed OR Regain OR pharmacotherapy OR Obesity medications) AND Weight loss (OR Total weight loss OR total body weight loss OR Excess weight loss OR Excess Body mass index loss) were applied.

One reviewer conducted title and abstract screening with 10% cross-checked by a second reviewer. Both reviewers examined articles identified for full-text review, and disagreements concerning inclusion were resolved by joint review. Manual search approaches were also used, and no language restrictions were established. *Figure 1* displays the PRISMA search process for the current review with the original review studies added. Due to the scarcity of robust level of evidence on the use of OMMs before and after MBS, prospective and retrospective series and RCTs were included in the search. As all analyses were performed based on previously published studies, no ethical approval or patient consent was required.

Levels of evidence

A standard Level of Evidence (LoE) descriptor was employed, defined as follows: IA—evidence from a meta-analysis of RCTs; IB—evidence from at least one RCT; IIA—evidence from at least one controlled study without randomization; IIB—evidence from at least one other type of quasi-experimental study; III—

Identification of studies via databases and registers

Identification

Records identified from:
Databases: n = 3031
Registers n = 1183

Total: (MEDLINE: 117 + Embase: 784 + Cochrane central register of controlled trials: 1183 + PubMed: 2130 = 4214)

→ Records removed before screening
Duplicate records removed n = 1143
Records marked as ineligible by automation tools n = 0
Records removed for other reasons n = 0

Screening

Records screened
n = 3071

→ Records excluded n = 1134

Reports sought for retrieval
n = 1937

→ Reports not retrieved n = 0

Reports assessed for eligibility
n = 1939

→ Reports excluded n = 1878

Included

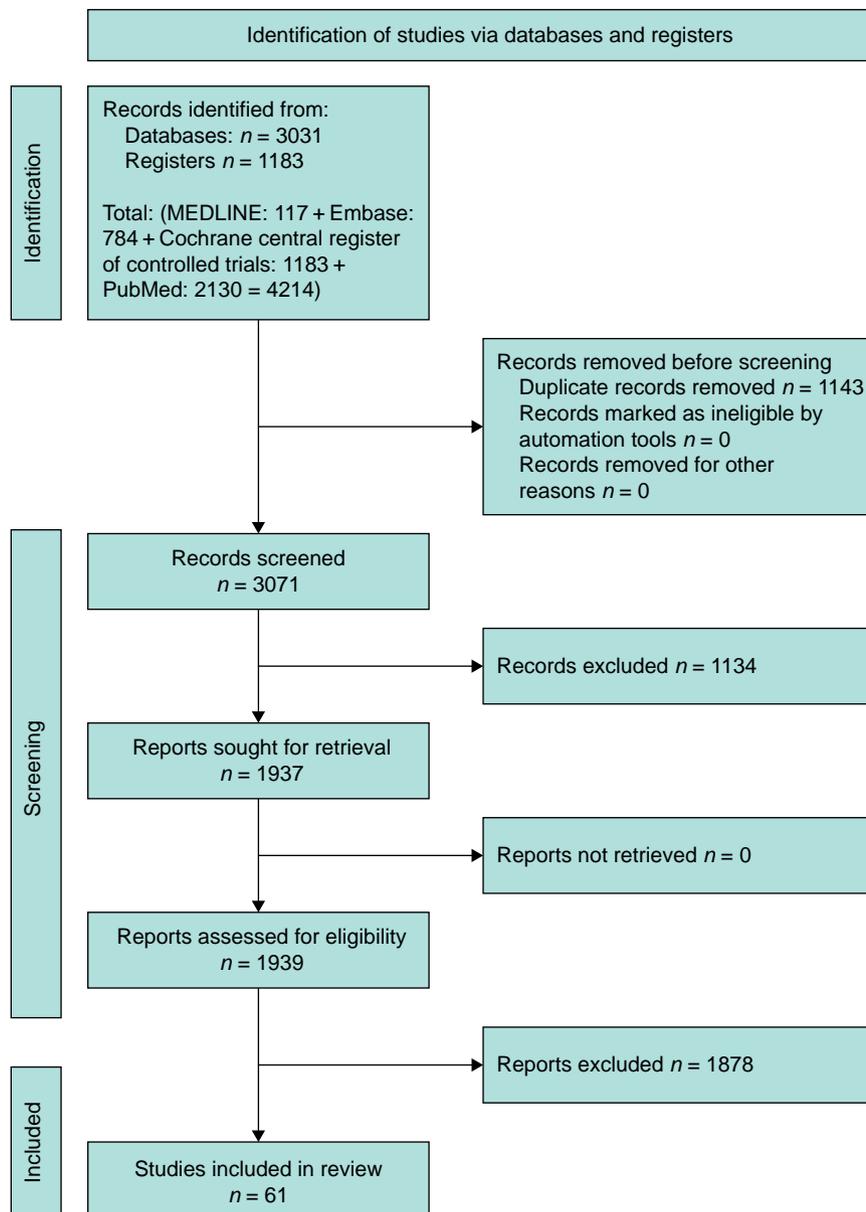Studies included in review
n = 61

Fig. 1 PRISMA statement

evidence from non-experimental descriptive studies, such as comparative studies, correlation studies, and case–control studies; and IV—evidence from expert committee reports, opinions, or clinical experience of respected authorities, or both.

Risk of publication bias

The risk of bias tools employed was the Joanna Briggs Risk of Bias Tool[9,10]. The risk of bias in all outcomes was considered 'not serious', but the heterogeneity remained quite high.

Preoperative use of obesity management medications
Impact of preoperative obesity management medications on perioperative complications

Preoperative weight loss likely poses little to no risk to patients. However, the impact of OMMs-induced preoperative weight loss on perioperative complications, such as surgical morbidity and mortality rates, remains insufficiently investigated (LoE III). Although some studies report that preoperative weight loss does not reduce mortality rate or improve long-term weight loss results[11], others showed that even moderate weight loss (that is, >0% to <5%) before MBS was associated with a lower risk of 30-day mortality[12] and reduction in surgical complications[13]. Preoperative weight loss programs may benefit perioperative performance (that is, technically easier operation)[14]. A recent prospective open-label study has investigated the efficacy of liraglutide, including a dose of up to 1.8 mg in combination with a hypocaloric diet and leucine-based amino acid infusion, as preoperative bridging therapy in 26 patients with 'inoperable' obesity necessitating emergent MBS[15]. Patients had a BMI over 70 kg/m^2 and concurrent obesity complications that were considered life-limiting, rendering them unsuitable for intragastric balloon bridging therapy. Laparoscopic operability was objectively assessed with ultrasound findings and subjectively by two highly experienced bariatric surgeons, enrolling only those deemed inoperable. Throughout the preoperative treatment, all 26 patients

remained hospitalized due to obesity-related complications requiring inpatient care. Leucine-rich amino acid infusion expedites liver volume reduction, promotes faster weight loss, and prevents muscle wasting during the hypocaloric diet. The termination of preoperative bridging therapy was contingent upon the bariatric surgeons' evaluation of technical operability. All 26 patients attained technical operability by achieving a median total body weight loss (TWL) of 11.4% within 20.7 ± 6.7 days and underwent laparoscopic sleeve gastrectomy (SG) without immediate complications. Compared to the matched historical cohort receiving standard 6-month bridging therapy using an intragastric balloon, the utilization of liraglutide facilitated technical operability within a significantly shorter treatment duration, suggesting this approach as a potential option for technically inoperable patients with BMI over 70 kg/m^2.

A retrospective study comparing intragastric balloon insertion ($n = 44$) or administration of 3.0 mg liraglutide ($n = 42$) in patients with a BMI over 50 kg/m^2 before SG[16] found that liraglutide used preoperatively for 24 weeks resulted in a median TWL of 6.7%, although this was significantly less than the TWL of 15.5% observed with intragastric balloons. The incidence of postoperative complications was lower with preoperative liraglutide use than with intragastric balloons, although not statistically different (7.1% *versus* 15.9%, $P = 0.31$).

Another retrospective study found that treatment with GLP-1RA, including liraglutide 3.0 mg and semaglutide 1.0 mg, for at least 6 months in patients awaiting MBS caused an average TWL of approximately 16% at 52 weeks, which was similar for both medications[17]. Interestingly, 68.6% of participants opted to withdraw temporarily from the MBS waiting list. Their decision to undergo MBS was significantly influenced by achieving a TWL > 15% after 52 weeks of pharmacotherapy while on the waiting list.

These findings collectively suggest (LoE III) that preoperative OMMs usage holds promise as a bridging therapy, facilitating faster and more effective weight loss compared to conventional non-pharmacological interventions. This is particularly relevant for optimizing patients before surgery, especially for those with either high BMI or severe obesity-related complications who are at increased surgical and medical risks. Although there are a limited number of studies specifically investigating the impact of OMMs-induced preoperative weight loss on perioperative morbidities, it is reasonable to infer that preoperative OMMs use could be beneficial in reducing surgery-related morbidity or mortality. This warrants clarification in future RCTs.

Association between response to preoperative obesity management medications and postoperative weight loss outcomes

The impact of preoperative weight loss on overall weight loss outcomes following MBS remains contentious. Some authors have shown enhanced postoperative weight loss in those patients who received preoperative OMMs, especially patients with a BMI > 60 kg/m^2. Cunningham *et al.*[18]. compared the outcomes of patients receiving phentermine and/or topiramate before MBS with those not receiving OMMs preoperatively. Using the Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Accreditation and Quality Improvement Program (MBSAQIP) curve for comparison, patients receiving medication preoperatively weighed 2.4% less than expected, whereas patients receiving medication during the first postoperative year weighed 4.8% more than expected[18]. Despite variation in its definitions, in a meta-analysis encompassing 3404 patients across 15 studies, preoperative weight loss was associated with a mean increase of 5% excess weight loss (95% c.i.: 2.68 to 7.32) at one year post surgery[19]. However, others argue that mandatory preoperative weight loss programmes or achieving preoperative TWL ≥ 5% is not associated with improved weight loss outcomes following MBS[11,20].

Another aspect of utilizing preoperative OMMs in patients considering MBS is their potential to predict response to surgery. GLP-1RAs mimic post-surgery weight loss mechanisms, potentially identifying patients likely to experience suboptimal outcomes. One study indicated that preoperative gut hormone responses, particularly fasting levels of GLP-1 and PYY, do not correlate with weight loss after Roux-en-Y gastric bypass (RYGB)[21]. Another study found similar postprandial hormone levels between patients with optimal and suboptimal weight loss after RYGB, suggesting that an impaired central response to gut hormones may contribute to suboptimal outcomes[22]. Further research is needed to validate these findings, especially regarding small bowel bypass procedures, which enhance gut hormone responses. *Table 1* summarizes the current literature on the preoperative use of OMMs.

Table 1 Summary of the evidence of preoperative use of OMMs

Study	Medication	Patients	Follow-up	Outcomes
Lo and Hsu[23]/retrospective	Orlistat, 360 mg/day	55/baseline BMI not informed	14 weeks	1.7% TWL
Malone *et al.*[24]/prospective matched paired	Orlistat 180 mg/day	19 orlistat × 19 placebo, BMI range 39–60 kg/m^2	6 months	2% TWL orlistat 5.4% placebo
Morton *et al.*[25]/RCT	Phentermine 8 mg × placebo	14 phentermine 10 placebo, BMI 44–52 kg/m^2	3 months	6.3 ± 1.5% *versus* phentermine 1.4 ± 1.5%, placebo. $P = 0.0465$
Martines *et al.*[16]/retrospective	IGB/Liraglutide 3 mg	42 liraglutide and 44 IGB, BMI > 50 kg/m^2	12 months	15.5% TWL IGB 6.71% TWL liraglutide
Rubio-Herrera *et al.*[17]/retrospective	Liraglutide 3 mg or semaglutide 1 mg	BMI ≥ 40 kg/m^2 or BMI ≥ 35 kg/m^2 + related complications, 102 patients on the waiting list for MBS	12 months	16.9 ± 7.2% TWL sema 1 mg* 16.1 ± 5.8% TWL Lira 3 mg*
Wilmington *et al.*[26]/retrospective	Liraglutide 3 mg	50 patients, BMI.40 kg/m^2	12 months	85.7% TWL > 5% 33.3% TWL > 10%†
Cunningham *et al.*[18]/retrospective	Phentermine and/or topiramate × no OMMs	98 patients, BMI > 60 kg/m^2	24 months	31.3% TWL OMMs pts 25.3% TWL without OMMs

IGB, intragastric balloon; MBS, metabolic bariatric surgery; OMMs, obesity management medication; TWL, total body weight loss. *68.6% of participants were satisfied with the achieved weight loss and withdrew from the waiting list for MBS. †10% of participants discontinued medication due to tolerability issues.

An important preoperative issue with GLP-1RAs is their effects on delaying gastric emptying and the potential development of aspiration pneumonia during anaesthesia. It is advisable that this class of medication is be stopped before MBS[27]. The American Society of Anesthesiologists recommends that patients on daily dosing refrain from using GLP-1RAs on the day of the procedure/surgery. For patients on weekly dosing, the recommendation is to refrain from their use for one week before the procedure/surgery[28] (LoEIII).

Postoperative use of obesity management medications

Understanding the need for combined strategies

In RCTs, MBS has been consistently superior to medical treatment regarding weight loss and control of type 2 diabetes (T2D)[29]. However, adopting a multimodal approach to care, including combining OMMs with MBS, warrants investigation given the likelihood of suboptimal initial clinical response or recurrent weight gain and T2D relapse following a period of remission[30,31]. Data from RCTs address the potential for combining MBS with OMMs are scarce. However, this appears to be a novel therapeutic approach, particularly given the recent developments in pharmacotherapy with significant weight loss and T2D management.

The Surgical Therapy and Medications Potentially Eradicate Diabetes Efficiently (STAMPEDE) study compared intensive medical therapy (without modern OMMs) to MBS plus medical treatment[32]. A 5-year follow-up found that the surgical arms plus the best medical treatment achieved significantly more weight loss than the medical arm alone, further supporting combining medications with surgery (LoE Ib).

The 'Microvascular Outcomes after Metabolic Surgery'[33] is an RCT comparing best medical therapy, including liraglutide, with RYGB in patients with T2D and established microalbuminuria to examine remission of albuminuria, weight loss, and glycaemic control among other secondary endpoints. Medications with recognized benefits for macro- and microvascular were continued in both the medical and RYGB arms. OMMs were stopped in the RYGB arm. At 60 months, albuminuria remission was similar between groups, but weight loss and glycaemic control were better after the RYGB plus medications group, demonstrating the safety of combining medication with surgery and its efficacy compared to medical therapy alone. (LoE Ib).

The Alliance of Randomized Trials of Medicine *versus* Metabolic Surgery in Type 2 Diabetes (ARMMS-T2D)[34] pooled the results of four separate RCTs, all designed to evaluate the effectiveness of MBS compared with combined medical therapy and lifestyle management, in improving glycaemic control in people with T2D and a BMI of 27–45 kg/m^2 for up to 12 years of follow-up[33]. Its importance relies on the superiority of MBS in terms of weight loss and T2D control. However, the effects of surgery decreased over time, suggesting the potential need for adjunctive pharmacotherapy to maintain optimal long-term outcomes (LoE Ib).

As seen with other chronic diseases, not only are lifelong treatment strategies needed, but disease processes also inevitably progress. Nevertheless, learning from best clinical practice in oncology, treatment intensification at the outset appears attractive, which may include additional pharmacotherapy as an adjuvant treatment to MBS to maintain or improve disease control. There is no published literature on the outcomes and safety of continuous or intermittent use of OMMs after MBS.

Optimal timing of initiation of obesity management medications

There is controversy on when to start adjunctive pharmacotherapy after MBS. Some advocate waiting for the occurrence of a weight plateau or early weight recurrence to be able to disclose the effects of MBS before adding OMMs. Others start medications sooner in specific situations, such as for individuals with a baseline BMI > 50 kg/m^2, or early suboptimal initial clinical response, a proxy of greater severity of the disease[35,36].

A prospective study with phentermine and topiramate (phen/top) combined with SG compared to SG alone in patients with BMI > 50 kg/m^2 showed better weight loss after the early association of phen/top than surgery alone[37] (LoE III). Two RCTs, one with phen/top and the other associated with liraglutide plus SG compared with SG alone, concluded that the early addition of OMMs after SG significantly augmented weight loss compared to SG alone without any significant adverse event[38,39] (LoE Ib).

Historically, a conservative approach for using OMMs in people undergoing MBS has been upheld, typically reserving them for patients who attain weight stability or once recurrent weight gain becomes evident. However, recent advancements in novel OMMs with good efficacy and safety profiles offer compelling grounds for a more proactive pharmacological approach in earlier stages. Nevertheless, given the lack of robust evidence, well-designed clinical trials are needed to substantiate such clinical practice. These trials must delineate short-term efficacy and elucidate long-term health benefits, extending beyond mere weight loss.

Obesity management medications for suboptimal initial clinical response or recurrent weight gain

A higher preoperative BMI has been associated with recurrent weight gain and a worse weight trajectory after surgery[40]. Patients with a baseline BMI ≥ 50 kg/m^2 are at a higher risk for recurrent weight gain, and may therefore benefit from earlier initiation of OMMs, whereas there is no convincing information on the role of dietary and behavioural interventions in promoting additional weight loss, mitigating suboptimal initial clinical response, or preventing recurrent weight gain in the long term[41].

Only two RCTs have addressed the safety and efficacy of using GLP-1RA after recurrent weight gain or suboptimal initial clinical response after MBS (LoE Ib). The GRAVITAS trial[42] compared liraglutide (1.8 mg/day) *versus* placebo in patients with persistent or recurrent T2D at least one year after RYGB or SG. The primary endpoint was glycaemic control, which was significantly better with liraglutide ($P < 0.0001$). The change in HbA1c at 26 weeks from the baseline was −11.4 mmol/mol (95% c.i.: −13.7 to −9.1) with liraglutide 1.8 mg ($n = 48$) *versus* 4.1 mmol/mol (95% c.i.: 0.8 to 7.5) with placebo ($n = 23$; mean difference −13.3 mmol/mol; 95% c.i.: −19.7 to −7.0) (LoE Ib). Moreover, a significant reduction in body weight by −5.3 kg (95% c.i.: −6.2 to −4.4) was noted at 26 weeks in the liraglutide group compared with no significant change (−0.9 kg, 95% c.i.: −2.1 to 0.4) in the placebo group (mean difference −4.2 kg; 95% c.i.: −6.8 to −1.6). Furthermore, 46% of patients in the liraglutide group lost >5% of their body weight compared with only 9% in the placebo group. Adverse events were similar to those observed in unoperated patients receiving liraglutide.

The BARI-OPTIMISE trial[43] compared daily liraglutide (3.0 mg) to placebo over 24 weeks in patients with suboptimal weight loss and GLP-1 response after bariatric surgery (MBS). Among 57

Table 2 Summary of the current literature on postoperative OMMs for suboptimal initial clinical response and/or recurrent weight gain, including traditional and modern agents

Authors/study type	Medication	Index operation and time since the intervention	Patients	Follow-up	Outcomes
Zoss et al.[49] Prospective	Orlistat 240 mg daily	AGB, at least 12–24 months postop	19 orlistat + diet counselling 19 Diet counselling	8 months, with 9 months extension in the orlistat group	8 ± 3 kg orlistat group 3 ± 2 kg counselling group
Hanipah et al.[50] Retrospective	Phentermine Phentermine/topiramate extended-release Lorcaserin Naltrexone slow-release/bupropion slow-release*	RYGB, SG, AGB Median of 38 months postop	126 RYGB 52 SG 21 AGB	12 months	% of patients > 10% TWL RYGB 17.2% AGB 23.5% SG 2.4% *P* < 0.001
Stanford et al.[51] Retrospective	Among 15 agents, topiramate, phentermine, metformin, bupropion, and zonisamide were the most prescribed	RYGB, SG At least 12 months postop	258 RYGB 61 SG	Not available	Topiramate was the only medication that demonstrated a 2× more chance of >10% TWL RYGB pts achieved more TWL than SG
Schwartz et al.[52] Retrospective	Phentermine or phentermine–topiramate extended-release	RYGB, AGB Time since MBS not available	51 RYGB 14 AGB	3 months	Phentermine (6.35 kg, 12.8% EWL) and phentermine–topiramate extended-release (3.81 kg, 12.9% EWL *P* < 0.001)
Istfan et al.[53] retrospective	Topiramate, phentermine	RYGB, 6 months to 6 years	350	Up to 11 years	Topiramate and phentermine decrease cumulative WR by about 10% relative to nadir weight and reduce the odds of rapid WR after RYGB
Pajecki et al.[54] Retrospective	Liraglutide 1.8 mg	RYGB, AGB, BPD-DS, SG, 2–13 years	9 RYGB 4 AGB 1 SG 1 BPD-DS	28 weeks	A mean of 7.3% TWL among all patients
Rye et al.[44] Retrospective	Liraglutide 3 mg	RYGB, SG, VBG, AGB. Time since MBS not available	7 RYGB 7 SG 3 VBG 3 AGB	28 weeks	Median of 9.7% TWL
Vinciguerra et al[55] Retrospective	Liraglutide 3 mg	RYGB, SG, AGB, OAGB	119 patients	28 weeks	Mean TWL 9.3 ± 3.6%
Suliman et al.[56] Prospectively collected chart data	Liraglutide 3 mg	SG, RYGB, others	120 SG, 47 RYGB, 21 other	4 months	Mean 6.1% TWL
Muratori et al.[57] Retrospective	Liraglutide 3 mg	RYGB, SG, AGB 70.7 months ± 43.7	17 RYGB 22 AGB 23 SG	28 weeks	Mean of 12.2% TWL
Wharton et al.[45] Retrospective	Liraglutide 3 mg	RYGB, AGB, SG 7.8 ± 5.7 years	53 RYGB 50 AGB 14 SG	Up to 12 months	RYGB 6.6% TWL AGB 4.9% TWL SG 4.5% TWL|
Jamal et al.[58] Retrospective	Liraglutide 3 mg	SG, 1–10 years	57	3 months	8.10% TWL
Horber and Steffen[59] Prospective†	Liraglutide 3 mg	RYGB > 6 years	95	24 months	Liraglutide group lost 4.8 ± 2.9 kg/m² and pouch trimming plus silastic ring, 5.5 ± 2.9 kg/m²
Hany et al.[60] RCT	Liraglutide up to 3 mg	Conversions of SG into RYGB	38 Liraglutide 31 placebo	12 months	24.1% TWL for Liraglutide 22.7% TWL placebo (*P* < 0.001)
Mok et al.[43] RCT	Liraglutide up to 3 mg × placebo	SG or RYGB with ≤20% body weight loss, >12 months after MBS	Lira 35 Placebo 35	6 months	Liraglutide group 8.8% TWL Placebo group 0.5% TWL
Miras et al.[42] RCT	Liraglutide 1.8 mg × placebo	SG RYGB > 1 year since MBS	19 SG 51 RYGB	6 months	Mean difference in weight change from baseline to week 26 for liraglutide *versus* placebo of –4.23 kg (*P* = 0.0017) TWL was a secondary endpoint
Lautenbach et al.[61] Retrospective	Semaglutide from weekly 0.25 mg. The maximum dose reached was not disclosed	SG and RYGB 64.7 ± 47.6 months	29 SG 15 RYGB	6 months	10.3 ± 5.5% for both operations

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Authors/study type	Medication	Index operation and time since the intervention	Patients	Follow-up	Outcomes
Bonnet et al.[62]*‡ Retrospective	Semaglutide up to 2.4 mg	SG and RYGB Time since surgery not disclosed	28 SG 8 RYGB	6 moths	Median of 9.1% TWL for both operations
Jensen et al.[47] Retrospective	Semaglutide 2.4 mg × Liraglutide 3 mg	RYGB and SG 43–90 months since MBS	29 Sema 21 Lira	6 months	9.8% TWL Sema 7.1% Lira (P < 0.001)
Murvelashvili et al.[48] Retrospective	Semaglutide 1 mg × Liraglutide 3 mg	SG and RYGB Time since surgery not disclosed	115 Semaglutide 92 Liraglutide	12 months	12.9%TWL Sema 8.8%TWL Lira (P < 0.001)
Jamal et al.[58] Retrospective	Semaglutide 2.4 mg Tirzepatide up to 15 mg	115 SG 1–15 years	70 Semaglutide 45 Tirzepatide	6 mo	10.3%TWL Semaglutide 15.5% TWL Tirzepatide (P < 0.05)
Gazda et al.[63]	GLP-1RA × non-GLP1-RA × Lifestyle interventions	80 SG 73 RYGB 54 GB		12 months	1.6%TWL lifestyle interventions 5.6% non-GLP-1RA 6.9% GLP-1RA N.S.§

AGB, adjustable gastric banding; BPD-DS, biliopancreatic diversion with duodenal switch; GLP-1RA, Glucagon-Like Peptide-1 Receptor agonist; MBS, metabolic/bariatric surgery; OAGB, one anastomosis gastric bypass; RYGB, Roux-en-Y gastric bypass; SG, sleeve gastrectomy; VBG, vertical banded gastroplasty; TWL-total weight loss. *The co-morbidities and the relative contraindications present in each patient often govern the choice of weight loss medications. †Liraglutide patients were compared to two other interventions—gastric pouch trimming + silastic ring and endoscopic anastomosis narrowing. Liraglutide was as efficient as the surgical option, with significantly fewer complications. Both had significantly better weight loss than the endoscopic approach. ‡Bonnet et al. compared semaglutide in two groups, with and without prior MBS. %TWL was the same. §In a multiple regression analysis, regardless of MBS type, GLP-1RA treatment was the only significant predictor of percentage weight change.

patients who completed the study, the liraglutide group experienced significant weight loss at 24 weeks, 8.8% ± 4.9% with liraglutide 3.0 mg ($n = 31$) *versus* 0.5% ± 3.3% with placebo ($n = 26$; $P < 0.001$), corresponding to a mean difference of 8.0% (95% c.i.: −10.4 to −5.7) in %TWL. Greater than 5% TWL was achieved in 71.9% of cases in the liraglutide group compared to 8.8% in the placebo group. The liraglutide group achieved greater improvements in fasting glucose, HbA1c, blood pressure, and cholesterol. Although gastrointestinal side effects were more common with liraglutide, they were milder than in non-surgical patients, and no serious adverse events occurred.

Differences in weight loss between the BARI-OPTIMISE and GRAVITAS trials may be due to GRAVITAS including only patients with T2D and lower liraglutide doses. Both trials suggested that weight loss continued without plateauing, indicating that longer trials are needed to evaluate liraglutide's long-term efficacy. Several retrospective studies have shown that liraglutide (3.0 mg) effectively promotes weight loss after MBS in patients with suboptimal results[44,45]. Weight loss ranged from 5.5% to 9.7% across treatment periods of 3–12 months, similar to the results in the BARI-OPTIMISE trial. In one study of 145 patients, liraglutide resulted in comparable weight loss for those who had primary surgery (6.0%–6.9% at 6 and 12 months) and revisional surgery (5.0%–6.4%)[46].

No RCTs have been published on the use of semaglutide following MBS. Two retrospective studies (LoE III) compared the effectiveness of 3.0 mg liraglutide and 1.0 mg semaglutide for weight loss. The first study[47] involved 50 patients undergoing MBS who were treated for suboptimal weight loss or recurrent weight gain. Patients received either daily 3.0 mg liraglutide or weekly 1.0 mg semaglutide for 6 months. Results showed that semaglutide led to significantly greater weight loss (median: 9.8%) compared to liraglutide (median: 7.8%), with a higher proportion of patients in the semaglutide group achieving more than 5% total weight loss (86% *versus* 69%). The second study[48], with a larger cohort of 207 patients treated for 12 months, also found that 1.0 mg semaglutide was more effective, resulting in more

significant weight loss (12.9%) compared to 3.0 mg liraglutide (8.8%). Both studies indicate that semaglutide at 1.0 mg is more effective for weight loss than liraglutide at 3.0 mg. *Table 2* summarizes the current literature on postoperative pharmacotherapy, including conventional and modern OMMs.

Although there is some evidence on the use of OMMs as adjuncts to MBS in suboptimal initial clinical response or recurrent weight gain, there are no data on starting OMMs before the weight plateau. Ideally, OMMs should be tailored to the patient to optimize weight loss and help improve obesity-associated complications[64].

Obesity management medications *versus* revisional surgery

Deciding between pharmacotherapy, revisional surgery, or conversional surgery for recurrent weight gain after MBS is challenging, as the level of evidence for each strategy is low (LoE III). A retrospective study compared outcomes in 150 patients treated with pharmacotherapy and 27 who underwent conversional surgery[65]. The most common surgery was SG-to-RYGB conversion. Pharmacotherapy involved four medications: phentermine, topiramate, liraglutide, and orlistat, resulting in a mean of 0.7% and 1.9% TWL in patients with suboptimal initial clinical response and recurrent weight gain respectively. In contrast, conversional surgery achieved 23.8% and 17.2% TWL respectively.

Another retrospective study examined liraglutide's effectiveness in patients with recurrent weight gain over 6 years post-RYGB, comparing it to lifestyle modifications, endoscopic transoral outlet reduction, and surgical pouch resizing with Fobi-ring implantation[59]. Liraglutide reduced BMI by 4.8 kg/m² over 24 months, similar to the 5.5 kg/m² reduction seen with pouch resizing. Unlike the endoscopic group, both liraglutide and surgical revision demonstrated significant improvements in obesity-related complications.

The variability in outcomes between pharmacotherapy and surgical interventions across studies is influenced by the specific medications and types of surgeries used. Revisional surgeries carry higher risks of complications compared to primary surgeries, making modern pharmacotherapy a promising option for those at high surgical risk[66].

Discussion

This review of the existing literature highlights the evidence about the use of traditional and modern OMMs before and after MBS. OMMs have been shown to accelerate preoperative weight loss and provide a non-surgical alternative for patients post-MBS that may reduce the need for revisional surgery. However, the current evidence base is limited by the retrospective nature of most studies with inconsistent protocols and few RCTs. Therefore, more well-designed RCTs are needed to validate these findings.

There are several unresolved issues. Long-term benefits of traditional and modern OMMs are not well-documented, with follow-up typically limited to 6–24 months, except the SELECT trial that showed positive cardiovascular outcomes after around 4 years of follow-up[67]. There is evidence that patients may regain weight after stopping OMMs, similar to the patterns observed in chronic disease management, suggesting that continuous medication use may be necessary, as shown in the STEP 1 extension and Surmount 4 trial, which investigated the impact of discontinuing treatment following an initial lead-in period with semaglutide and tirzepatide respectively. These found substantial regain of lost weight during the additional 1-year follow-up after stopping the medications[68,69].

Moreover, individual responses to MBS vary, with many patients experiencing some degree of RWG, complicating the standardization of management guidelines.

Earlier reluctance to use OMMs stemmed from their modest efficacy and safety concerns. However, modern OMMs show improved efficacy and tolerability, potentially revolutionizing obesity management. Early data support integrating OMMs with MBS to optimize long-term outcomes. There is a need for further research into patient selection, timing, and long-term efficacy of these combined strategies, along with addressing cost and accessibility issues to improve patient outcomes.

Although modern OMMs are emerging as valuable options in managing obesity, their role appears to be complementary to MBS, requiring a tailored, multimodal approach to optimize both short-term and long-term outcomes.

Funding

Acknowledgement

Disclosure

Data availability

No data are presented.

Author contributions

Ricardo Cohen (Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing—original draft, Writing—review & editing), Ji Yeon Park (Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing—review & editing), Alexander D Miras (Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing—review & editing), Gerhard Prager (Writing—review & editing), Marco Bueter (Writing—review & editing), Carel Le Roux (Conceptualization, Writing—review & editing), Chetan Parmar (Methodology, Writing—review & editing), Mohammad Kermansaravi (Methodology, Writing—original draft), and Paulina Salminen (Writing—original draft, Writing—review & editing)

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