

The Beginner's Meal Guide for Tirzepatide & Retatrutide

A simple, protein-forward approach for your first weeks and beyond

Read This First — Quick Safety Note

This guide is general nutrition education, **not medical advice**. It is not personalized to you and is not a substitute for your prescriber or a registered dietitian.

- **Tirzepatide** is an FDA-approved prescription medication (e.g., Mounjaro/Zepbound). Use it exactly as prescribed.
- **Retatrutide** is still **investigational** in most of the world and is not broadly approved. If you are using it, it should be under medical supervision.
- **Tell your clinician right away** if you have: persistent vomiting, severe abdominal pain, signs of dehydration (dizziness, dark urine, not urinating), jaundice, or any allergic reaction. These can signal serious issues like pancreatitis, gallbladder problems, or severe dehydration.
- **Check with your clinician before significantly increasing protein** if you have kidney or liver disease, are pregnant/breastfeeding, have a history of eating disorders, take diabetes medications (insulin/sulfonylureas), or have had bariatric surgery.
- **Electrolyte packets** can be a problem if you've been told to limit sodium or potassium (kidney disease, heart failure, high blood pressure, certain meds). Ask your clinician before using them routinely.
- **Call your clinician** if you have: no bowel movement for several days, persistent vomiting, inability to keep fluids down, or severe/worsening abdominal pain.

For reference, the most common side effects reported in retatrutide trials were nausea, diarrhea, constipation, and vomiting ([Eli Lilly](#)); full tirzepatide prescribing and safety information is on the [FDA label](#).

The big idea: On these medications your appetite drops and food moves through your stomach more slowly. That makes under-eating, dehydration, and muscle loss the real risks — not over-eating. Your job is to get enough **protein, fluids, and nutrients** in despite a low appetite.

Part 1 — The Goal

Goal	Why it matters
Preserve muscle	Rapid weight loss can take muscle with it. Protein + light resistance training protects it.
Stay hydrated	These meds blunt thirst and increase fluid loss (nausea, diarrhea). Dehydration drives dizziness and fatigue.
Avoid under-eating	"Not hungry" ≠ "well nourished." Too little food = fatigue, hair thinning, weakness, stalled progress.
Support digestion	Slower stomach emptying causes nausea, reflux, and constipation. How and when you eat matters as much as what.

Part 2 — The First Two Weeks: "Drink Your Nutrition"

Your appetite may be very low and solid food may feel heavy or nauseating. **Liquid nutrition** is easier to get down, digests more gently, and lets you spread calories across the day in small sips.

The Liquid-Forward Framework (Days 1–14)

Aim for 2–3 protein drinks/day, plus small sips of water/electrolytes all day, and one small soft-food meal if tolerated.

Time	What to have	Protein target
Morning	Ready-to-drink (RTD) protein shake or protein smoothie	~25–35 g
Mid-morning	Sip: bone broth or clear protein drink	~10–20 g
Midday	Greek yogurt smoothie or protein oatmeal made with milk	~25–35 g
Afternoon	Sip: electrolyte water + a protein drink if hungry	~20–30 g
Evening	Small soft meal (see below) OR another shake	~25–35 g

Easy Liquid-Calorie Ideas

- **RTD protein shake** (Fairlife, Premier, Core Power) + half a banana
- **Greek yogurt smoothie**: Greek yogurt + milk + frozen berries + scoop of protein powder
- **Protein oats**: oats cooked with milk + scoop of protein powder
- **Bone broth + collagen** — count these as **bonus** protein, not your main muscle-preserving protein (use whey/dairy/egg as your base). Bone broth is great for hydration and sipping, but it is not a meaningful protein source on its own.
- **Cottage cheese blended into a smoothie** (tastes like a milkshake, high protein)
- **Clear protein drinks** (clear whey/isolate) when creamy shakes feel too heavy

Liquid-Phase Rules

- **Sip, don't chug.** Small sips throughout the day beat large drinks, which trigger nausea.
- **Keep drinks cool or room-temp.** Hot drinks and strong smells worsen nausea.
- **Avoid sugary liquids** (regular soda, juice-heavy smoothies, sweet coffee drinks). High sugar + slow stomach = worse nausea and reflux.
- **Go easy on fat in shakes** (no heavy cream, large nut-butter scoops). Fat also slows emptying and worsens fullness/nausea.
- **Separate fluids from meals** by ~30 minutes if drinking with food makes you overly full.

Part 3 — Protein: How Much and What Kind

A Simple Target

- A broad starting range: ~80–120 g of protein per day, or roughly 25–35 g per meal/snack.
- If you want a body-weight version: about 1.2–1.6 g per kg of body weight per day is a common clinical guide — some clinicians base this on goal/adjusted body weight, especially for larger bodies. This must be individualized if you have kidney disease. Skip the math if it stresses you out — hit the per-meal target instead.
- Your number depends on your size, sex, activity, and kidney health. **This is a starting point, not a rule.**

Best Protein Sources (complete, leucine-rich — best for preserving muscle)

Liquid/easy: whey protein powder, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, milk (Fairlife is higher-protein), clear whey isolate

Soft/easy: eggs/egg bites, canned tuna or salmon packets, rotisserie chicken, deli turkey, tofu

Solid (as appetite returns): lean poultry, fish, lean beef, pork, soy, beans + rice

Protein tip: whey, dairy, eggs, meat, fish, and soy are "complete" proteins (they have all the building blocks your muscles need). Collagen is fine as an add-on but should not be your main protein source.

Part 4 — The Daily Eating Foundation (Once You're Eating Solids)

Once solids feel okay, build every meal around this simple formula:

Protein + Produce/Fiber + Smart Carb + Healthy Fat — in small portions, 4–6 times a day.

Component	Examples
Protein (eat this first)	Eggs, chicken, fish, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, tofu, lean beef
Produce/Fiber	Berries, banana, spinach, cucumber, zucchini, carrots, apple
Smart carb	Oats, rice, potatoes, quinoa, whole-grain bread, fruit

Component	Examples
Healthy fat (small amounts)	Olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds

Eating Rules That Reduce Side Effects

1. **Eat protein first.** When appetite is low, protein wins the limited space.
2. **Small meals, more often.** 3 small meals + 2–3 snacks beats one big meal. Big meals = nausea and reflux.
3. **Don't starve all day then feast at night.** It backfires hard on these meds.
4. **Chew well, eat slowly.** Your stomach empties slowly — give it a head start.
5. **Stop at "comfortably satisfied," not "full."** Over-eating triggers nausea and reflux for hours.
6. **No lying down right after eating.** Wait 2–3 hours to reduce reflux.

Part 5 — Simple Meal & Snack Templates

Pick one from each category. Mix and match. Keep it low-effort.

Breakfasts

- Greek yogurt + berries + drizzle of honey
- 2–3 scrambled eggs or egg bites + toast
- Protein oatmeal (oats + milk + protein powder)
- Protein smoothie (see Part 2)
- Cottage cheese + fruit

Lunches

- Rotisserie chicken + cucumber + cherry tomatoes
- Tuna packet + crackers + apple
- Deli turkey roll-ups + string cheese
- Soup (lentil, chicken, bean) + a protein drink
- "Snack plate": hard-boiled eggs, cheese, grapes, turkey

Dinners

- Grilled chicken or fish + rice + roasted veg
- Ground turkey + taco seasoning + beans + rice bowl
- Baked salmon + sweet potato + green beans
- Shrimp stir-fry (keep sauce light) + rice
- Rotisserie chicken + microwave steamable veg + potato

Snacks (protein-forward)

- Greek yogurt or cottage cheese
- String cheese + handful of nuts
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Protein shake
- Tuna or chicken packet + crackers
- Edamame
- Protein bar (check sugar — keep it under ~10 g)

Build-a-Bowl Formula

Pick one from each: **Protein + Grain + Veg + Sauce (light)**

- Example: chicken + rice + broccoli + light teriyaki
- Example: tofu + quinoa + cucumber/carrot + light peanut sauce

Part 6 — Side Effects & How to Fight Them

Side effect	What to eat/do	What to avoid
Nausea	Small, bland, cold or room-temp meals (toast, rice, banana, crackers, yogurt). Ginger tea or ginger chews. Sip fluids between meals, not with them.	Hot, greasy, spicy, fried foods. Strong cooking smells. Large portions. Drinking lots with meals.
Constipation	Drink fluids all day. Add fiber gradually — berries, chia/flax, oats, veggies, beans. Walk daily.	Sudden huge fiber increases (causes bloating). Processed low-fiber foods. Sitting all day.
Diarrhea	Bland foods (rice, bananas, toast, applesauce). Hydrate with electrolytes.	High-fat, high-sugar foods and alcohol.
Acid reflux / heartburn	Smaller meals. Stop eating 2–3 hours before bed. Sit upright after eating.	Fatty/fried foods, spicy foods, citrus, tomatoes, carbonation, large late meals, lying down after eating.
Fatigue / weakness	Check that you're eating enough calories, carbs, and protein. Add hydration + electrolytes.	Skipping meals, under-eating all day.
Dehydration / dizziness	Sip water all day (don't chug). Add electrolyte packets (sodium/potassium). Call your clinician if persistent.	Going hours without fluids. Heavy caffeine/alcohol.
"Full but haven't eaten"	Switch to liquid nutrition (shakes, smoothies, broth) for that meal.	Forcing a big solid meal.

Hydration Basics

- **Sip, don't chug** — aim steadily through the day.
- A broad daily target: **64–100 oz of fluids** (adjust to your size, activity, climate, and any fluid restrictions from your clinician).
- **Add electrolytes** (1 packet/day or as needed), especially if you're nauseated, sweating, or in heat.
- **Limit caffeine and avoid alcohol** — both worsen dehydration and nausea.

Activity Basics

- **10-minute walk after meals** — genuinely helps digestion, reflux, and blood sugar.
- **2–3 short strength sessions/week** — bodyweight is fine (squats, push-ups, bands). This is the single best way to protect muscle while losing weight.
- **Keep it light** during dose-escalation weeks if fatigue hits; don't force intense workouts.

Part 7 — A Sample 2-Week Liquid-Forward Plan

Days 1–7 (mostly liquid + one small soft meal):

- Morning: RTD protein shake + half banana
- Mid-morning: bone broth sipped slowly
- Lunch: Greek yogurt smoothie (Greek yogurt + milk + berries + protein powder)
- Afternoon: electrolyte water + protein shake if hungry
- Evening: small soft meal — e.g., scrambled eggs + toast, or soup + crackers

Days 8–14 (transition to easy solids):

- Morning: protein oatmeal or Greek yogurt + fruit
- Lunch: tuna packet + crackers + apple, or chicken + cucumber
- Afternoon: protein shake or string cheese + nuts
- Evening: rotisserie chicken + rice + steamable veg

Listen to your body. If a shake goes down easier than solids, stay liquid-forward longer. The goal is getting nutrition in — however that looks for you right now.

Part 8 — Starter Grocery List

Protein (liquid):

- [] RTD protein shakes (Fairlife, Premier, Core Power)
- [] Whey protein powder (or clear whey isolate)
- [] Clear protein drinks

- ☐ Bone broth

Protein (soft/solid):

- ☐ Greek yogurt (plain)
- ☐ Cottage cheese
- ☐ Eggs
- ☐ Deli turkey / turkey roll-ups
- ☐ Tuna & chicken packets
- ☐ Rotisserie chicken
- ☐ String cheese
- ☐ Canned salmon / tuna

Carbs:

- ☐ Oats
- ☐ Rice / rice cups
- ☐ Potatoes
- ☐ Whole-grain bread / crackers
- ☐ Bananas, apples, berries

Produce/Fiber (introduce gradually):

- ☐ Berries
- ☐ Bananas
- ☐ Steamable frozen veg (broccoli, green beans)
- ☐ Cucumber, cherry tomatoes
- ☐ Chia seeds / ground flax

Hydration/electrolytes:

- ☐ Electrolyte packets
- ☐ Ginger tea / ginger chews
- ☐ Sugar-free electrolyte drinks

The One-Page Recap

1. **Weeks 1-2: drink your nutrition.** 2-3 protein drinks/day + small soft meal. Sip, don't chug.
2. **Hit ~80-120 g protein/day** (~25-35 g per meal). Whey/dairy/eggs/meat/fish/soy first.
3. **Eat small, often.** Protein first, then produce, carb, healthy fat. Stop at satisfied, not full.
4. **Hydrate all day** (64-100 oz) + electrolytes. No lying down after meals.
5. **Fight side effects with food:** bland/cold for nausea, gradual fiber + walking for constipation, small early meals for reflux.

6. **Move:** 10-min walk after meals + 2–3 strength sessions/week to keep your muscle.
7. **Eat enough.** Under-eating is the real danger here — not over-eating.

Sources

- [Eli Lilly — Retatrutide trial results and adverse events](#)
- [FDA — Tirzepatide \(Zepbound/Mounjaro\) prescribing information](#)
- [FDA — Approval of medication for chronic weight management](#)
- [ClinicalTrials.gov — Retatrutide study \(NCT05882045\)](#)
- [Mayo Clinic — Tirzepatide side effects and dosing](#)

This guide is general education only and is not medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always follow your prescribing clinician's instructions and consult them or a registered dietitian for personalized guidance — especially if you have kidney or liver disease, are pregnant, take diabetes medications, or have a history of eating disorders or bariatric surgery.