BEYOND THE SCALE

Protect the Muscle

A field guide to keeping lean mass while you lose weight on a GLP-1

The goal you were sold is a smaller number on the scale. The goal that actually protects your health is narrower than that: lose fat while keeping muscle. Those are not the same outcome, and the difference decides how strong, how metabolically healthy, and how durable your results will be once the weight is off. This guide is the short version of how to keep the muscle while the fat comes off.

The driver is the deficit, not the drug. The medication works by reducing how much you eat, and that calorie deficit, not the molecule itself, is what puts muscle at risk. This is good news, because it means the risk is manageable. You cannot remove the deficit without losing the benefit, but you can change what your body does inside it.

Why the scale rewards muscle loss

Muscle is dense and heavy. When your body breaks it down, the scale drops quickly, which feels like success. Fat loss alone moves the number more slowly. So the single measurement most people watch quietly rewards the outcome you least want. The fix is not to push harder on the scale. It is to give your body clear reasons to hold onto muscle, and to track the right thing.

Lever 1: Protein, anchored to lean body mass

Protein is the signal that tells your body to keep muscle while it loses fat. Two things matter: how much, and what you measure it against. Anchor the target to your lean body mass, never to your total body weight, and never to an idealized weight. Protein needs track the tissue that uses protein, which is your lean mass, not the fat you are working to lose. Dosing against total weight overfeeds the wrong compartment, and dosing against an imagined ideal weight is guesswork.

A practical protective target during active weight loss is roughly 2.0 to 2.2 grams of protein per kilogram of lean body mass each day. Distribution matters as much as the total. Muscle repair responds to a threshold at each meal, so several protein-forward meals beat one large serving. Aim for a dose at each meal large enough to cross that threshold, roughly 25 to 35 grams of high-quality protein, which supplies the leucine that switches repair on.

Lever 2: Resistance training

Protein gives the body a reason to keep muscle. Resistance training gives it the demand. In controlled study, adding resistance training during GLP-1 weight loss preserved lean body mass that was otherwise lost. What matters is loading: train the major muscle groups against meaningful resistance two to four times per week, and increase the challenge over time.

Walking and other cardio are valuable for many reasons, but they do not send the same signal to keep muscle that loading does.

Lever 3: Creatine and the basics

Creatine monohydrate is among the most studied supplements in human performance, with consistent evidence for strength and lean mass when paired with resistance training, and particular relevance as we age. It matters more on a GLP-1, because most dietary creatine comes from meat, and meat intake usually falls when appetite does. A daily dose of roughly 3 to 5 grams is the standard. Around it, protect the basics: enough total food to supply the protein you need, adequate hydration, and real recovery, since muscle is rebuilt between sessions, not only during them.

Know your lean body mass

You cannot dose protein to your lean mass if you have never measured it, and you cannot tell whether you are preserving muscle if you only watch the scale. A body composition measurement, by DEXA or a validated method, gives you the denominator for your protein target and the baseline you will track against. This is the line between guessing and managing.

The protocol at a glance

- ☐ Set your daily protein target against your lean body mass, not your total or idealized weight.
- ☐ Spread protein across the day so each meal delivers enough to trigger repair, roughly 25 to 30 grams of high-quality protein.
- ☐ Train against resistance two to four times per week, with enough load to be genuinely challenging.
- ☐ Consider 3 to 5 grams of creatine monohydrate daily, which matters more as food intake falls.
- ☐ Measure lean mass at the start and track it, so you know whether the plan is working.

You will know the plan is working when the scale moves and your lean mass holds, and when your strength stays or climbs. That combination, not the scale alone, is the target.

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