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THE GLP-1 MEAL PREP SYSTEM

The Protein-First Guide to Preserving
Muscle, Increasing Energy, and Building
Healthy Habits That Last



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HEALTHIER TOMORROW.**

DIANA C. SPENCER



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Muscle, Increasing Energy, and Building
Healthy Habits That Last**

Diana C. Spencer

Published by Healthy Aging Labs LLC



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The information in this book is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

Nutritional information, meal plans, and recipes are intended as general guidance and may not be appropriate for every individual.

Always consult your physician or another qualified healthcare professional before making changes to your diet, exercise program, medications, or health care, particularly if you have a medical condition or are taking prescription medications, including GLP-1 medications.

The author and publisher assume no responsibility for any adverse effects or consequences resulting from the use of the information contained in this book.



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A PERSONAL NOTE

Like many people, I began this journey hoping to improve my health and lose weight. Through my own GLP-1 journey, I experienced many of the same questions, adjustments, and challenges that so many others face.

What surprised me most was not the weight loss itself. It was how dramatically my relationship with food began to change. For the first time in years, food noise became quieter. Portions naturally became smaller. Cravings became more manageable. Weight loss no longer felt like a constant battle against hunger.

At the same time, I quickly realized something I had not fully expected: as appetite decreased, **nutrition became more important**—not less.

It became easier to eat less. It did not automatically become easy to eat well.

When appetite is low, skipping meals, under-consuming protein, overlooking hydration, or going too long without meaningful nourishment can happen surprisingly easily because hunger is less noticeable. Over time, these patterns can affect energy, strength, recovery, digestion, and muscle preservation.

That realization led me to look beyond individual meals and recipes. I began building simple systems that made healthy choices easier—from organizing the kitchen and planning groceries to preparing protein-rich meals and creating routines I could realistically maintain.

Over time, those systems became more valuable than any single recipe or meal plan.

They helped transform everyday decisions into habits that supported strength, energy, and long-term health.

Drawing on my personal experience, professional background in health and wellness, and current scientific research, I created this guide to share the practical systems and strategies that made the greatest difference in my own journey.

My goal is to help you build a way of eating that feels realistic, sustainable, and supportive—not only during your GLP-1 journey, but throughout your healthy aging journey.



ABOUT THIS BOOK

Beginning a GLP-1 journey often comes with excitement, questions, and a surprising realization: eating less does not automatically mean eating better.

As appetite changes, thoughtful nutrition becomes increasingly important. Protein, hydration, strength, and consistency all play a critical role in preserving muscle, supporting energy, and promoting long-term health.

This book was created to help bridge that gap. It combines practical nutrition guidance, easy to follow meal preparation strategies, high-protein recipes, and realistic meal plans designed for everyday life.

The focus is on helping you build simple, sustainable habits that support successful weight management, preserve strength, and promote healthy aging—during your GLP-1 journey and for years to come.

Underlying these recommendations is a clear philosophy: long-term health is shaped by a handful of foundational practices applied consistently over time. At Healthy Aging Labs, we refer to these as the Five Pillars of Healthy Aging™—Nutrition, Hydration, Movement, Recovery, and Cognitive & Emotional Wellbeing.

Together, they provide a practical framework for translating evidence-based principles into everyday actions that support strength, vitality, resilience, and long-term wellbeing.



THE FIVE PILLARS OF HEALTHY AGING™

Where Evidence Meets Everyday Life.™



NUTRITION

Fuel your body with protein-rich, nutrient-dense foods that support strength, energy, and long-term health.



HYDRATION

Support every system in your body through consistent hydration and healthy daily habits.



MOVEMENT

Build strength, mobility, and physical function through regular activity and purposeful movement.



RECOVERY

Restore and recharge through quality sleep, stress management, and recovery practices.



COGNITIVE & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Support resilience, purpose, learning, and mental fitness throughout life.

PREPARATION + CONSISTENCY

The Behaviors That Make Healthy Aging Sustainable

Plan ahead. Build simple systems. Repeat supportive habits consistently over time.

STRENGTH

VITALITY

RESILIENCE

INDEPENDENCE

The Healthy Aging Framework™ provides a practical system for turning evidence-based principles into sustainable daily habits that support **strength, vitality, resilience, and long-term wellbeing.**



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While all five pillars contribute to healthy aging, this guide focuses primarily on **Nutrition, Hydration, and Movement**, with particular emphasis on protein intake, muscle preservation, and sustainable habits during a GLP-1 journey.



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HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS GUIDE

You can read this guide from beginning to end or jump directly to the sections that best fit your current needs.

If you are new to GLP-1 medications, begin with **Section I: Understanding Nutrition on a GLP-1 Journey** to learn the foundations of protein, hydration, balanced meals, and muscle preservation.

If you want to create a more supportive food environment, focus on **Section II: Building a Simple GLP-1 Food System**, which covers kitchen organization, meal preparation, grocery planning, and budget-friendly strategies.

If you are looking for practical meal ideas, recipes, and inspiration, jump directly to **Section III: High-Protein Recipes for Real Life**.

If consistency, habit-building, or long-term success has been your greatest challenge, spend time with: **Section IV: Plans, Consistency, and Long-Term Success**.

However you choose to use this guide, remember that lasting success is built one habit at a time.

NOW YOUR TURN

Turn the page and begin discovering a meal prep system designed to fit your life, support your health, and help you build lasting habits. Make this guide your own—highlight favorite recipes, take notes, bookmark ideas, and return to it whenever you need inspiration.

Enjoy the journey, celebrate your progress, and remember that lasting success is built one healthy choice at a time.

Let's begin.



SECTION I

Understanding Nutrition on a GLP-1 Journey

Understanding how appetite, metabolism,
nutrition, and muscle preservation work
together during weight loss and
healthy aging.



Chapter 1: Understanding Appetite, Metabolism, and Modern GLP-1 Nutrition

The Shift That Changes Everything

For years, weight-loss advice seemed straightforward: eat less, move more, try harder.

But the human body has never been that simple.

Today, we understand far more about appetite, metabolism, blood sugar regulation, muscle preservation, and long-term health than we once did. Hunger is not simply a matter of willpower, and fullness is not random. Energy levels, cravings, recovery, and body composition are shaped by a complex mix of biology, nutrition, movement, sleep, stress, and the environment around us.

Understanding that changes the conversation about weight management – especially during a GLP-1 journey.

GLP-1 medications can make it easier to eat less by reducing appetite, slowing stomach emptying, and helping quiet the persistent mental pull of food. For many, that shift feels life changing. Portions become smaller. Cravings become easier to manage. Food noise becomes quieter, and weight loss may finally feel less like a constant battle. (Drucker, 2018; Müller et al., 2019; Wilding et al., 2021).

But this remarkable shift also creates a new challenge:



Eating less does not automatically mean nourishing the body well

That realization changed the way I thought about success. When I began this journey, success meant seeing a smaller number on the scale.

Today, I think about success differently.

Success is having the strength to stay active, the energy to enjoy life, and the confidence that I'm nourishing my body well—even when my appetite changes from day to day.

Losing weight opened the door. The habits I built are what I believe will stay with me for years to come.

That is the journey I trust this book helps you build for yourself.

In many ways, this is one of the biggest gaps in today's GLP-1 conversation. Much of the public discussion focuses on weight-loss results, medication access, side effects, or supplements.

Far less attention is given to the practical nutrition and lifestyle strategies that help people protect their health while losing weight. When following a GLP-1 protocol there are several questions that come up frequently.

Questions such as:

- How much protein do I need?
- How do I protect muscle while losing weight?
- What should I eat when my appetite is low?
- How do I stay nourished when food becomes less appealing?



Throughout this book, you'll see two principles repeated often because they influence almost every nutritional decision you'll make on the GLP-1 journey:

Protein First™ • Preparation First™

When appetite decreases, every bite becomes more valuable. Prioritizing protein helps preserve muscle, supports recovery, and provides the nutrients your body needs during weight loss.

Preparation makes those healthier choices easier to follow, especially on days when your appetite, schedule, or energy changes.

Together, these two principles become the foundation for every strategy, recipe, meal plan, and habit you'll build throughout this book.

Successful weight management supports strength, physical function, long-term energy, and the habits that make those outcomes sustainable.

The science explains **why** these strategies work. The chapters that follow will show you **how** to put them into practice.

Appetite Is Biology, not a Character Flaw

One of the most important lessons of a GLP-1 journey is this:

Appetite is biological.

Hunger, fullness, cravings, energy levels, and eating behaviors are regulated through a sophisticated communication network involving the brain, digestive system, hormones, sleep, stress, and metabolism. Researchers refer to this communication network as the **gut-brain axis**—the ongoing connection between the digestive system and the brain that helps regulate when you feel hungry, how satisfied you feel after eating, and how much food sounds appealing (Drucker, 2018; Müller et al., 2019).



GLP-1, or glucagon-like peptide-1, is one of the key hormones involved in that system. It helps slow stomach emptying, increase fullness, and support blood sugar regulation. Other hormones, including leptin and ghrelin, also influence appetite and energy balance.

Understanding this changes the way we think about weight management. Appetite is not simply about discipline or willpower. Biology plays a powerful role in how hungry we feel, how often we think about food, how satisfied we feel after eating, and how difficult it may be to maintain consistency over time.

Quieter hunger changes more than the amount of food people eat. It often changes their relationship with food itself. Healthier choices become easier to make. Daily routines become easier to maintain. The experience can feel both physically and emotionally different from previous attempts at weight loss.

This realization can be incredibly freeing. It replaces self-blame with understanding and shifts the focus toward building habits that work with your body's biology rather than fighting against it.

Understanding your biology also brings a new responsibility.

When appetite is reduced, it becomes easier to **under consume essential nutrients** while still feeling full.

That is why a GLP-1 journey requires more **intentional eating**—not necessarily more food, but more strategic nourishment.



The Hidden Risk During Weight Loss: Losing More Than Fat

Weight loss is often discussed as if every pound lost is automatically a success. But from a health perspective, not all weight loss is the same.

Successful weight management improves body composition, preserves strength, supports mobility, and protects long-term metabolic health.

Muscle becomes central to healthy weight loss because it influences strength, mobility, and long-term health.

Muscle supports:

- Strength and physical function
- Metabolic health
- Balance and mobility
- Recovery and resilience
- Healthy aging and long-term independence

In other words, muscle is not just about how you look. It's one of the body's most important reserves for staying healthy, active, and independent as you age.

Current research and clinical guidance continue to emphasize that **preserving lean mass during weight loss matters**, especially as adults age and the risk of sarcopenia increases (Cruz-Jentoft et al., 2019; Bauer et al., 2013).

This becomes especially important during a GLP-1 journey, when reduced appetite can unintentionally lower total protein intake.

When appetite decreases, protein is often the first major nutrient to fall short – even though it is one of the nutrients your body needs most.



Prioritizing protein helps preserve muscle, support recovery, and maintain long-term health throughout weight loss.

The scale measures weight.

Strength measures health.

Why Exercise Matters on a GLP-1 Journey

Protein is essential, but it works best when it is paired with movement.

When the body is losing weight, it does not automatically lose only fat. Without enough protein and regular physical activity, some of that loss may come from lean muscle tissue as well. That matters because muscle supports far more than appearance. It helps determine how strong, capable, mobile, and resilient you remain over time.

Movement becomes an essential partner in protecting the muscle you're working to preserve.

Resistance training gives your body a reason to preserve muscle during weight loss. It provides the mechanical stimulus that supports lean mass preservation during weight loss and helps maintain strength, mobility, and physical function (Fragala et al., 2019).

Research suggests that combining anti-obesity medication with exercise may provide stronger support for long-term weight-loss maintenance and body-composition outcomes than either strategy alone (Lundgren et al., 2021).

Think of protein as providing the building blocks and movement as providing the signal to preserve muscle. Together they help protect lean muscle during weight loss.



Regular movement such as walking, cycling, swimming or other aerobic activities supports cardiovascular health, improves insulin sensitivity, builds endurance, helps regulate mood and stress, and contributes to long-term mobility and healthy aging.

Even lighter movement matters. Walking can support digestion, improve energy, help establish healthy routines, and reinforce the idea that **this journey is about caring for the body—not just making it smaller.**

Consistency matters far more than perfection. Regular movement – performed week after week - helps build and maintain a body that remains strong, functional and well supported throughout weight loss and beyond. Later in the book you will find practical trackers and planning tools designed to help you build consistent habits. Progress is rarely the result of one perfect workout – it comes from small actions repeated over time.

General physical activity guidelines recommend:

- at least 150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity
- muscle-strengthening activity at least 2 days per week
- regular balance and mobility work, especially with aging (Bull et al., 2020)

During a GLP-1 journey, **nutrition and movement form a powerful partnership – preserving strength**, supporting recovery, and protecting the long-term health you're working so hard to build.



Building Your Nutritional Foundation

Protein remains an important priority during a GLP-1 journey, but lasting health depends on the **overall quality of your nutrition**. Fiber-rich carbohydrates, healthy fats, hydration, and consistent eating patterns all work together to support strength, recovery, energy, and long-term health.

Fiber-rich foods such as vegetables, fruit, beans, legumes, oats, and whole grains help support digestion, blood sugar balance, fullness, and long-term metabolic health.

Healthy fats from foods like olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds, and fatty fish help support brain health, nutrient absorption, hormone function, and meal satisfaction.

Hydration supports digestion, energy production, muscle function, recovery, cognitive performance, and overall well-being.

Recent clinical nutrition guidance in older adults continues to emphasize the importance of hydration and adequate nourishment for physical function, resilience, and health outcomes, particularly when intake is reduced or inconsistent (Volkert et al., 2022).

Nourishment – not restriction – is what supports long-term success. Even smaller meals can provide meaningful nutrition when they are planned with intention.

Appetite is not always predictable during a GLP-1 journey. Some days you may feel normally hungry. Other days, food may barely sound appealing. In those moments, decision fatigue can easily lead to skipped meals, inadequate protein intake, or simply eating whatever feels easiest.

Preparing protein-rich meals, snacks, and ingredients ahead of time removes friction from healthy choices. It makes consistency easier when appetite, motivation, or energy changes from day to day.



Over the chapters ahead, you'll learn practical meal frameworks, recipes, grocery strategies, and planning tools that make these habits easier to build—and easier to maintain.

Looking Beyond Weight Loss

The habits you build during a GLP-1 journey have the potential to support your health long after the weight-loss phase is over. Consistent nourishment, strength, recovery, mobility, and confidence around food become part of a broader foundation for healthy aging.

Knowing how appetite, metabolism, and nutrition work together during a GLP-1 journey became a turning point in my own journey. For me, it brought the confidence to make better decisions each day—without second-guessing or feeling overwhelmed. My hope is that the same understanding gives you that confidence as well.

Understanding the science is only the beginning.

The next step is learning how to translate these principles into everyday meals and routines.

In Chapter 2, you'll discover a simple, practical framework for building balanced meals that support strength, energy, and long-term success—one plate at a time

HAL TIP

You don't need to understand every detail of nutrition science to be successful on a GLP-1 journey. Focus on a few foundational habits instead: prioritize protein, stay hydrated, move regularly, and prepare ahead. Those simple practices will support your health long after the weight-loss phase is over.