

Booming Demand for Obesity Pill to Solve Junk Food Problem

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✓ Fact Checked

May 18, 2023

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › The antiobesity injection Wegovy (semaglutide) has become so popular that, in early May 2023, Novo Nordisk announced it would cut the supply of starter doses for the U.S. market to “safeguard continuity of care” for existing patients
- › To maintain weight loss achieved on Wegovy, you must continue taking the drug indefinitely, or the weight will come back
- › The active ingredient in Wegovy, semaglutide, works by mimicking a hormone called glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1), which targets areas of your brain that regulate appetite and food intake. It also lowers blood sugar and slows the passage of food through your gut
- › In addition to a long list of common side effects, including severe nausea and vomiting, Wegovy also comes with warnings for thyroid parafollicular cell (C-cell) tumors, pancreatitis, gallbladder problems, acute kidney injury, diabetic retinopathy and suicidal thinking and behavior
- › If we are ever going to level out or diminish obesity and obesity-related cancer rates, we must address the underlying problem, which is a preponderance of ultraprocessed foods in our diet. Many studies have linked ultraprocessed foods to obesity, obesity-related cancers and poor mental health. We need better food, not more medication

As of 2021, the U.S. obesity rate among adults over the age of 20 was 41.9%.¹

Unfortunately, people have been indoctrinated into thinking that “magic pills” are the

answer, opposed to taking a long, hard look at your lifestyle, diet and eating habits.

Wegovy (semaglutide), given as a weekly self-injection, has become so popular that, in early May 2023, Novo Nordisk announced it would cut the supply of starter doses for the U.S. market to “safeguard continuity of care” for existing patients.² As reported by CNBC:³

“Novo Nordisk reported forecast-beating first-quarter sales Thursday following a spike in demand for its blockbuster weight-loss drug ... [Chief financial officer Karsten Munk] Knudsen said the company was ‘ramping up supply every day,’ and currently had two contract manufacturers working to boost output, with a third expected to come online in the second half of 2023.

He added that there were further plans to increase production in the coming years. ‘This is also a reflection of a very big market and a very big unmet need for safe and efficacious medication, and that’s where Wegovy comes in, being very efficacious and safe for patients [with obesity],’ he said.”

What You Need to Know About Wegovy

Wegovy was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in June 2021 for “chronic weight management in adults with obesity or overweight with at least one weight-related condition (such as high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes or high cholesterol).”⁴

The drug is indicated for patients with a body mass index (BMI) of 27 or greater who have at least one weight-related ailment, or in patients with a BMI of 30 or greater.

According to the FDA, the active ingredient in Wegovy, semaglutide, works by “mimicking a hormone called glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) that targets areas of the brain that regulate appetite and food intake.”⁵

GLP-1, which semaglutide mimicks, also lowers blood sugar and slows the passage of food through your gut.⁶ Gastrointestinal side effects are so common, the dose must be

gradually increased, from 0.25 milligrams to 2.4 mg over the course of 16 to 20 weeks.

In all, safety and efficacy have been studied in four 68-week trials involving a total of 2,600 patients who got the drug and 1,500 who got a placebo. In the largest placebo-controlled trial, nondiabetic patients who received Wegovy lost an average of 12.4% of their body weight compared to the placebo group.

In another trial, which enrolled adults with Type 2 diabetes, the average weight loss was 6.2% of their initial bodyweight, so clearly, diabetes can have a marked impact on the drug's effectiveness.

Side Effects and Warnings

As for side effects, the most common ones cited by the FDA are:⁷

Severe nausea and vomiting	Diarrhea or constipation
Abdominal pain and distension	Indigestion, belching and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
Headache	Fatigue
Dizziness	Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) in patients with Type 2 diabetes
Gastroenteritis (intestinal infection) and flatulence	

Wegovy also comes with warnings for:⁸

Thyroid parafollicular cell (C-cell) tumors – For this reason, the drug should not be used by those with a personal or family history of medullary thyroid carcinoma or multiple endocrine neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2)

Pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) – The drug has not been studied in people with preexisting pancreatitis or a history of pancreatitis

Gallbladder problems, including gallstones

Low blood sugar

Acute kidney injury

Diabetic retinopathy (damage to your eye's retina)

Increased heart rate

Suicidal thinking and behavior

Perhaps most importantly, to maintain your weight loss, you must keep taking Wegovy indefinitely. If you stop taking it, the pounds you've shed will come back. This explains why Novo Nordisk felt impelled to limit the availability of the drug for new patients, as they need to make sure those who are already on it can stay on it.

A Dangerous Nonsolution

According to Novo Nordisk, "hundreds of thousands" of Americans are already on the drug,⁹ but considering all the side effects, the warnings, and the fact that you have to take the drug for the rest of your life, how can anyone think that this is the answer to our obesity problem? So many things can go wrong here.

The crux of the problem is that this drug does nothing to address the root cause of the obesity. You're merely fiddling with brain chemistry to artificially suppress appetite, potentially becoming suicidal in the process.

Meanwhile, research has shown that processed foods affect your brain in detrimental ways, resulting in anxiety, depression and cognitive decline.¹⁰ So, basically, many are

eating processed junk that dysregulates their brain, and then taking a drug that merely dysregulates their brain even further.

Now, when taking Wegovy, you're supposed to follow a diet plan that stresses fresh whole foods and healthy fats.¹¹ Processed foods are supposed to be strictly limited. But how many patients actually follow that plan? If they did, they probably wouldn't need the drug!

The obvious answer here is to simply ditch processed foods and give your brain and body the nutrition that it needs for optimal function and regulation. If you're taking Wegovy and still eat processed foods, guess what? You're basically doubling up on your risk of chronic diseases like cancer and mental problems. To me, that's not a solution. It's deepening a problem that, for most people, can be resolved through diet and lifestyle changes alone.

Ultraprocessed Diet Associated With Poor Mental Health

Taking a closer look at how processed foods affect mental health, here's an excerpt from The New York Times:¹²

"Roughly 60% of the calories in the average American diet¹³ come from highly processed foods. We've known for decades that eating such packaged products – like some breakfast cereals, snack bars, frozen meals and virtually all packaged sweets, among many other things – is linked to unwelcome health outcomes, like an increased risk of diabetes, obesity and even cancer.

But more recent studies point to another major downside ... They appear to have a significant impact on our minds, too. Research from the past 10 or so years has shown that the more ultraprocessed foods [UPF] a person eats, the higher the chances that they feel depressed and anxious ...

In one 2022 study¹⁴ of over 10,000 adults in the United States, the more UPFs participants ate, the more likely they were to report mild depression or feelings of anxiety. 'There was a significant increase in mentally unhealthy days for

those eating 60% or more of their calories from UPFs,' Dr. Hecht, the study's author, said ...

New research has also found a connection between high UPF consumption and cognitive decline. A 2022 study¹⁵ that followed nearly 11,000 Brazilian adults over a decade found a correlation between eating ultraprocessed foods and worse cognitive function (the ability to learn, remember, reason and solve problems).

'While we have a natural decline in these abilities with age, we saw that this decline accelerated by 28% in people who consume more than 20% of their calories from UPFs,' said Natalia Gomes Goncalves, a professor at the University of São Paulo Medical School and the lead author of the study.'

While details are still sketchy, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the reason ultraprocessed foods have such a detrimental impact on mental and physical health is because they are loaded with high fructose corn syrup, which has loads of unfiltered starch in addition to the sugars and, of course, seed oils. Both of these factors tend to increase serotonin in the gut, which increases inflammation and cortisol levels that impair mental health.

Additionally, chemical additives in ultraprocessed foods also have a negative impact on your gut microbiome. Poor gut microbiota, in turn, promotes chronic inflammation, which can trigger or worsen a host of ailments, including obesity and depression. Considering the importance of a healthy gut, doesn't it seem beyond irrational to take a drug that causes severe gastrointestinal problems?

Ultraprocessed Foods Cause Obesity and Cancer

If we, as a society, are ever going to level out or diminish obesity and obesity-related cancer rates, we must address the elephant in the room, which is ultraprocessed foods. We cannot medicate ourselves out of these problems, especially considering that drugs

like Wegovy come with a warning of thyroid cancer and must be taken for life or else the weight comes back.

Many studies have linked ultraprocessed foods to obesity and obesity-related cancers. One of the most recent, published in May 2023, analyzed “the association of food deserts and food swamps with obesity-related cancer mortality in the U.S.” As noted in this study:¹⁶

“Obesity-related cancers account for 40% of all cancers in the US. Healthy food consumption is a modifiable factor shown to reduce obesity-related cancer mortality, but residing in areas with less access to grocery stores (food deserts) or higher access to fast food (food swamps) reduces healthy food access ...

This cross-sectional ecologic study used U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Environment Atlas data from 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017, and 2020 and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention mortality data from 2010 to 2020. A total of 3038 U.S. counties or county equivalents with complete information on food environment scores and obesity-related cancer mortality data were included ...

There was a 77% increased odds of having high obesity-related cancer mortality rates among U.S. counties or county equivalents with high food swamp scores ...

The findings of this cross-sectional ecologic study suggest that policy makers, funding agencies, and community stakeholders should implement sustainable approaches to combating obesity and cancer and establishing access to healthier food, such as creating more walkable neighborhoods and community gardens.”

The Food Industry Is Moving in the Wrong Direction

Meanwhile, the U.S. government is intentionally moving the food industry in the opposite direction, away from fresh, whole, natural foods and toward lab-grown meats and bioengineered plant foods.^{17,18}

It's done in the name of "sustainability" and "food security," but the real-world ramifications are not hard to predict. Replacing real food with ultraprocessed and genetically modified foods will devastate human health and reduce life expectancy.

Italy is one of the few countries that seems to have grasped this and is now seeking to ban lab-grown meat production, sale and consumption.¹⁹ As noted by Italy's Minister for Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry, Francesco Lollobrigida, lab-grown foods "do not guarantee quality, well-being and the protection of our culture, our tradition."

Indeed, synthetic meat, for example, is the epitome of ultraprocessed food,²⁰ and it's naïve to think it won't have health effects similar to other ultraprocessed foods. Obesity,²¹ Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and depression are but a few of the conditions known to be promoted and exacerbated by an ultraprocessed food diet.^{22,23,24,25,26}

At the same time, the White House is promoting the Cancer Moonshot,²⁷ a program aimed at cutting cancer rates by 50% or more over the next 25 years. There's no doubt in my mind that this program will fail, as it too is focused on biotechnology rather than creating a solid foundation for health through wholesome, unadulterated foods and the removal of chemical food additives.

CRISPR gene editing, for example, has been shown to trigger cancer. Cells whose genomes are successfully edited by CRISPR-Cas9 have carcinogenic potential, turning them into proverbial ticking time bombs. Yet gene editing is hailed as the answer to everything from food insecurity to chronic diseases like cancer. It's as though science has completely disconnected from reality.

“ If you're struggling with excess weight or chronic disease, one of the foundational 'treatment' strategies you need to embrace is to eat real food. ”

Ultimately, the answer to chronic disease rates, obesity and food insecurity lies not in a biotech-centered food system that is controlled from the top down, or in brain-altering

drugs that suppress appetite. The only viable long-term answer is a decentralized food system that connects communities with farmers who grow real food in sustainable ways and distribute that food locally. We need better food, not more medicine.

The fact that “hundreds of thousands” of Americans are already relying on a drug that’s been on the market for less than two years is a sad testament to how underinformed people are when it comes to health basics.

What Makes Foods Ultraprocessed?

If you’re struggling with excess weight or chronic disease, one of the foundational “treatment” strategies you need to embrace is to eat real food. A paper in Public Health Nutrition published in 2019 tells you how to identify ultraprocessed foods so that you can avoid them:²⁸

“Ultra-processed foods are defined within the NOVA classification system, which groups foods according to the extent and purpose of industrial processing.

Processes enabling the manufacture of ultra-processed foods include the fractioning of whole foods into substances, chemical modifications of these substances, assembly of unmodified and modified food substances, frequent use of cosmetic additives and sophisticated packaging ...

Minimally processed foods, that together with unprocessed foods make up NOVA group 1, are unprocessed foods altered by industrial processes such as removal of inedible or unwanted parts, drying, crushing, grinding, fractioning, roasting, boiling, pasteurization, refrigeration, freezing, placing in containers, vacuum packaging, or non-alcoholic fermentation.

None of these processes add salt, sugar, oils or fats, or other food substances to the original food. Their main aim is to extend the life of [the food] ... enabling their storage for longer use ...

NOVA group 2 is of processed culinary ingredients. These are substances obtained directly from group 1 foods or from nature, like oils and fats, sugar and salt. They are created by industrial processes such as pressing, centrifuging, refining, extracting or mining, and their use is in the preparation, seasoning and cooking of group 1 foods.

NOVA group 3 is of processed foods. These are industrial products made by adding salt, sugar or other substance found in group 2 to group 1 foods, using preservation methods such as canning and bottling, and, in the case of breads and cheeses, using non-alcoholic fermentation. Food processing here aims to increase the durability of group 1 foods ...

Ultra-processed foods are formulations of ingredients, mostly of exclusive industrial use, that result from a series of industrial processes (hence 'ultra-processed') ...

A practical way to identify an ultra-processed product is to check to see if its list of ingredients contains at least one item characteristic of the NOVA ultra-processed food group, which is to say, either food substances never or rarely used in kitchens ... or classes of additives designed to make the final product palatable or more appealing ...

Ultra-processed foods include carbonated soft drinks; sweet or savory packaged snacks; chocolate, candies (confectionery); ice cream; mass-produced packaged breads and buns; margarines and other spreads; cookies (biscuits), pastries, cakes and cake mixes; breakfast 'cereals'; pre-prepared pies and pasta and pizza dishes; poultry and fish 'nuggets' and 'sticks', sausages, burgers, hot dogs and other reconstituted meat products; powdered and packaged 'instant' soups, noodles and desserts; and many other products."

How to Identify Ultraprocessed Foods

Here's a more detailed breakdown of ingredients to look out for:²⁹

- Ingredients never or rarely used in kitchens:

High-fructose corn syrup and other added sugars, such as invert sugar, maltodextrin, dextrose and lactose

Hydrogenated or interesterified oils

Hydrolyzed proteins

Soy protein isolate

Gluten

Casein

- Additives:

Natural or artificial flavors

Flavor enhancers

Colors

Emulsifiers

Emulsifying salts

Artificial sweeteners

Thickeners

Anti-foaming agents

Bulking agents

Carbonating agents

Foaming agents

Gelling and glazing agents

To these lists, I would add any food that contains vegetable oils or seed oils, such as corn oil, sunflower oil, canola oil, cottonseed oil, soybean oil, grapeseed and safflower oil.

Seed oils are commonly used in cooking, even home cooking, but if you want to shed weight and improve your health, they need to be strictly avoided, as they're very high in omega-6 linoleic acid, which is a primary driver of chronic disease. To learn more, see "[Linoleic Acid – The Most Destructive Ingredient in Your Diet.](#)"

Sources and References

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