

New research explores why some people stay on weight-loss drugs that make them feel sick

Kristen Dalli · Feb. 11, 2026

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Many semaglutide (e.g., Ozempic) users keep taking the drug because they see real weight loss or appetite reduction.

A Rutgers study analyzed anonymous online reviews to understand what drives people’s decisions to continue or stop treatment.

Gastrointestinal side effects like nausea were common but didn’t strongly deter users — lack of results did.

Weight-loss medications like semaglutide — often known by brand names such as Ozempic — have become a huge part of the public conversation about obesity and body weight.

However, these drugs aren’t without downsides: many users report unpleasant side effects, especially gastrointestinal discomfort.

With all the buzz out there — on social media, in the news, and across conversations about health — researchers at Rutgers Health wanted to understand something deeper: when people actually use these medications in real life, what makes them stick with them or stop?

“Ozempic has become a cultural phenomenon, but much of the public conversation has been driven by celebrity endorsements and social media trends rather than the voices of everyday users,” researcher Abanoub Armanious, said in a news release.

“Our study cuts through the noise to ask a simple question: What do people actually experience when they use this medication for weight loss, and what shapes their decision to keep going or stop?”

The study

Instead of relying on data collected in a clinical trial setting, the Rutgers team used a method called “infoveillance” to tap into publicly available online health data.

They analyzed 60 anonymous, freely-posted medication reviews from a health information website. These reviews came from people who shared their own experiences using semaglutide for weight loss — what they noticed about how it made them feel, what benefits they saw, and whether they planned to keep using it.

Rather than controlled clinical measurements, this approach centered on what real users say matters most to them in everyday life — something often missing from traditional research.

By combing through these narratives and categorizing people's reported outcomes and attitudes, the researchers could see patterns in satisfaction, persistence with the treatment, and reasons for discontinuing it.

What the results show

Here's what stood out: the biggest factor linked with both satisfaction and the intention to keep taking the drug was how effective people perceived it to be.

Most users who said they lost weight, ate less, or had fewer food cravings also said they planned to stick with the treatment, even if they experienced side effects like nausea or vomiting. Roughly two-thirds (67%) mentioned these positive effects.

On the flip side, people who didn't see much weight loss or who dealt with other, non-gastrointestinal side effects were more likely to say they would stop using the medication.

Interestingly, the common stomach-related side effects didn't strongly influence users' overall decisions to continue — suggesting that, for many, seeing results mattered more than feeling sick.

"There's been a lot of focus on the side effects of GLP-1 medications – nausea, digestive issues – and whether they're worth it," researcher Morgan James said in the news release.

"What we found is that for many users, the calculus is straightforward: If the drug helps them lose weight, they're willing to tolerate significant discomfort. That tells us something important about the demand for effective weight loss options and how we need to think about supporting such patients."

The authors emphasize that understanding patient experiences — especially outside clinical settings — can help doctors and patients have clearer conversations about expectations and side effects. They also suggest future studies should explore how attitudes might change over time or differ between groups of people.