

Despite Side Effects, People Continue Taking Ozempic for Weight Loss

Mandy French · February 16, 2026

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GLP-1 medications prescribed for weight loss are rapidly gaining popularity. An estimated 1 in 8 adults reported having taken a GLP-1 weight loss medication at some point, according to a poll conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF).

Now, a new study from Rutgers Health researchers found that among those taking the GLP-1 drug Ozempic, which is frequently prescribed off-label for weight loss, many are willing to continue using it despite unpleasant side effects. The findings were recently published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.

"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," lead study author Abanoub Armanious, a graduate student at the Rutgers School of Public Health, said in a press 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?," Armanious continued.

The research team took a novel approach to this study, called "infoveillance," to capture patient-centered perspectives that are generally underrepresented in clinical trials. Infoveillance is the use of publicly available online health data.

The researchers analyzed 60 anonymous, publicly available reviews from a health information website. They found that most individuals were satisfied with their treatment when they experienced notable weight loss or reduced food cravings.

Gastrointestinal issues, such as nausea and vomiting, were reported by 62% of users. However, these side effects did not appear to significantly affect their satisfaction scores or continuation decision.

"Nausea, vomiting, and constipation are generally better tolerated by patients seeking these medications. In contrast, diarrhea and abdominal pain are more common reasons for patients to discontinue treatment," Mir Ali, MD, bariatric surgeon and medical director of MemorialCare Surgical Weight Loss Center at Orange Coast Medical Center in Fountain Valley, CA, who was not involved in the study, told Healthline.

The study found that people who experienced little to no weight loss or non-gastrointestinal side effects were more likely to discontinue treatment.

"There's been a lot of focus on the side effects of GLP-1 medications – nausea, digestive issues – and whether they're worth it," Morgan James, PhD, adjunct assistant professor of psychiatry at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, a senior lecturer of psychology at the University of Sydney, and senior author of the study, said in a press 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," he said.

The study also found that around 67% of GLP-1 users reported weight loss, appetite reduction, or reduction of food cravings while taking the medication, which the researchers note aligns with clinical trial findings.

"Patients using these medications, especially those paying out of pocket, often show a higher willingness to tolerate side effects compared to other treatments. Those seeking these medications are highly motivated to lose weight and frequently request additional medications to counteract side effects rather than stopping the primary treatment," notes Ali.

The research team notes that more research is needed. They suggest future research focuses on: whether perceptions of treatment differ by sex, given evidence that weight loss responses may vary; how patient attitudes change over time, particularly as weight loss slows or reverses; potential mental health effects associated with semaglutide use; collecting demographic and treatment-related information to build on these findings.

The most common side effects of GLP-1s, like Ozempic, include: nausea, vomiting, constipation, and abdominal pain. Less common, but more severe side effects include: pancreatitis, or inflammation of the pancreas; vision changes; hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar; kidney issues due to dehydration; gallbladder issues; and allergic reactions.

"Side effects of GLP-1 medications are typically mild and vary from patient to patient. More severe complications, such as inflammation of the gallbladder or pancreas, are relatively rare," Ali said.