

# STAT REPORTS

STAT SPECIAL REPORT

## THE OBESITY REVOLUTION

How GLP-1 drugs are changing  
science, business, health care,  
and society

Ozempic, Wegovy, Mounjaro — new, highly effective obesity drugs are dominating medical conferences, peppering the media, and moving the stock market. These so-called GLP-1-based treatments are blockbusters with the potential to alter societal views of illness and health as profoundly as Valium did in the 1960s or Prozac in the 1980s.

This report gathers articles from STAT's series "The Obesity Revolution," a yearlong examination of the development and future of these drugs and their far-ranging implications.

We guide you around the rapidly evolving business landscape for obesity medications. Pharma giants Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly are developing a stream of new treatments, competing head-to-head to dominate the growing market, which some analysts predict could balloon to \$100 billion by the end of the decade. Dozens of startups have also jumped into the race, some hoping to stand out by pursuing entirely novel drug mechanisms. This all has ripple effects for medical device makers and telehealth companies trying to capitalize on the surge of demand for effective weight loss interventions.

While the treatments are a windfall for drugmakers, they pose enormous challenges for payers, as they each carry list prices of over \$10,000 annually and are meant to be taken indefinitely. This report shows what pharma companies are arguing to justify such costs, and the vigorous pushback — including threatening letters — from payers who are not yet convinced.

We dive deep into the surprising and sometimes fractious science behind the drugs. They were originally created as diabetes treatments,

based on the GLP-1 hormone that triggers insulin production in the gut. But it turns out the drugs — which have much more potent and longer-lasting effects than the natural hormone — also trigger reactions in the brain, helping explain how they help reduce food cravings and potentially other addictive behaviors. You'll read about the history behind the drugs and the threads scientists are now following to understand the full spectrum of benefits the treatments can offer.

As use of the GLP-1 drugs becomes more widespread, they could fundamentally shift how doctors practice medicine and how society thinks about disease. The renewed focus on weight when evaluating patients has prompted a rethink of how to best define obesity, with many doctors questioning the use of the body mass index. More broadly, doctors are debating how helpful the message pushed by pharma companies is — the message that obesity is a biological, treatable disease. Some think it helps destigmatize obesity, which has been traditionally viewed as a failing of one's willpower, while others fear that the relentless promotion of the drugs could further alienate people with bigger bodies by constantly telling them that they have a problem.

The age of Ozempic has begun. But the obesity revolution is just getting started.



**Elaine Chen**

Cardiovascular disease reporter

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# ABOUT STAT

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