

“I DON’T HAVE AN OSCAR DRESS TO GET INTO”;

GLP-1S BEYOND WEIGHT LOSS



The global landscape of GLP-1 receptor agonists for weight loss is rapidly expanding, with an increasing number of patients turning to these innovative drugs to manage weight and improve overall health. As the prevalence of obesity continues to rise worldwide, and clinical trials have demonstrated the efficacy of these drugs in promoting weight loss, the demand for GLP-1s is growing.

GLP-1 agonists, originally developed to treat type 2 diabetes, have recently gained FDA approval for weight loss, propelling them into the spotlight. They are already a multi-billion-dollar industry, and their growth shows no signs of waning.

Highlights At-a-glance:

Although obesity is linked to a range of conditions and medical comorbidities, the appeal of GLP-1 use for obesity also extends to more general ‘wellness’, or even emotional, benefits.

Framing obesity as a disease, rather than a perceived failure of willpower, is powerful; a decrease in ‘food noise’ is freeing and motivating for many on GLP-1s.

Any anxieties about a future on GLP-1s (regaining weight, side effects, costs), are offset by the fear of consequences from continuing to be obese.

Having a perspective on GLP-1 use is imperative as the possible impact of these medications on a large swath of the population is significant medically, socially, and economically.

Across Ipsos’ Consumer Obesity Monitor, 73% of US participants strongly agreed that obesity is a major health issue that deserves more attention. We are seeing people use GLP-1s across a range of comorbidities and a variety of health and wellness goals. For those working in this space it’s important to understand the perceived benefits that GLP-1s offer, and what to keep in mind as the market for GLP-1s continues to grow.

In early 2024, the Ipsos Ethnography Center of Excellence followed the journey of three Americans via digital ethnography for a first-person account of their day-to-day realities starting on GLP-1s. What follows is a window into their specific experiences, capturing what is particularly resonant for them.

As the population taking GLP-1s continues to grow and diversify, there are many more stories, and many more insights, to capture.



You don’t understand; to me, the weight loss is just a plus

The conversation around GLP-1s warrants broadening beyond the scale, as achieving a certain physical ideal may not be the primary benefit to some.

Some respondents in the Consumer Monitor understood that weight is linked to a constellation of conditions, from medical comorbidities – such as type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and cardiovascular disease – to mental disorders such as depression and anxiety, as well as alcohol and substance abuse.

For those participating in Ipsos’ digital ethnography study, the overarching value of GLP-1s is rooted in wellness, rather than weight. “There is a difference between quality and quantity of life”, and a push to not just age, but to thrive with age: “I don’t just want to live to be 65, I want to be living well.”

For more information please contact:

Alex Stiver, PhD
Victoria Guyatt
Roberto Cortese
Georgina Ngo

Watch our ethnography participants discuss their journey with GLP-1s here:
<https://vimeo.com/video/954670855>
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Similarly, Ipsos' Consumer Monitor found that 70% of current users of anti-obesity medications strongly agreed that they offered a valid and effective way to treat health conditions beyond weight reduction. Those on GLP-1s may have varying definitions of success, with weight loss being only one of the perceived advantages.

“ I'm not fighting with myself anymore

Beyond the physical, GLP-1s also influence emotional wellness as “[weight] is a mental hurdle as much as it is a physical hurdle.” GLP-1s help to medicalize what individuals often grapple with for years as an emotional issue: not being ‘good’ or ‘disciplined’ enough to achieve and sustain weight loss.

Across digital ethnography participants there was a common theme of self-blame for their obesity. GLP-1s provide an emotional reprieve for individuals, allowing them to productively address obesity as a disease, rather than a perceived failure of willpower.

The rise of GLP-1 use has highlighted the term food noise – the constant ‘what / when / how much’ narrative circling in peoples’ minds – into common parlance. GLP-1s quell this noise; consequently, individuals speak of finally feeling “free” and no longer having the sense of “falling off the cliff” at any moment. With all that we are constantly juggling in our lives, regaining mental bandwidth is a significant benefit of GLP-1s.

“ We are in uncharted territory here

Despite positive sentiment towards GLP-1s, ethnography participants expressed some anxiety about staying on them long-term for obesity, including unknown side effects, inconsistent access to supply, and significant out-of-pocket costs if not covered by insurance.

Although individuals are choosing to embrace GLP-1s on the short- and mid-term horizon, there is a lack of clarity about longer-term implications. Some continue to question whether, once on the drug, they will need to remain on some dose indefinitely: “the literature is not looking good about being able to come off [GLP-1s] and live a happily ever after.”

Indeed, the issues raised by the ethnography participants mirror the top three concerns articulated by current anti-obesity medication users surveyed in the Consumer Monitor: risk of regaining weight, possible side effects, and the high costs of medication.

Ultimately, however, any anxiety about the future on a GLP-1 is offset by a more overwhelming, and unknown, fear: the potentially debilitating consequences of continuing to be obese.

...what about the impact more broadly?

The possible impact of GLP-1s on a large swath of the population is significant; however, it is also fair to wonder whether they are helping to address any of the deeper contributing issues to the global obesity pandemic.

Inevitably there will be significant shifts resulting from GLP-1 use: what will individuals be consuming, wanting in their homes, and purchasing to support their wellness? How will grocers, restaurants, and packaged food and drink companies pivot to accommodate a new narrative around consumption? How will other industries – e.g. fashion, or travel – adapt? How will the healthcare space adjust to a population on GLP-1s in terms of supply and demand of certain medications, and philosophies behind how weight and related comorbidities are addressed and managed?

There are many questions that remain unanswered on the GLP-1 landscape, and many developing conversations waiting to happen. Trust Ipsos as an informed voice and research partner as this topic area finds new articulations, shifts, and expands.

*all quotes are from Ipsos' digital ethnography conducted April - May 2024

*all numbers cited are from the Ipsos Global Consumer Obesity Monitor, an ongoing multi-client study conducted among general consumers, the GLP-1 treatment-eligible population, and users of anti-obesity medications (including users of GLP-1s, specifically). The Study tracks the changing ways in which consumers are managing their weight, captures awareness of and experiences with novel anti-obesity treatments (led by the new generation of GLP-1-based drugs), and assesses the effects of these drugs on users' lifestyles, attitudes and consumption habits. Results cited in this paper were from Wave 1, conducted online from December 2023 to January 2024 among a sample of 1,750 general consumers in US. An additional quota of 123 AOM users provided a total sample of 200 AOM users. Of these, 151 were using GLP-1-based AOMs, specifically.

For more information please contact:

Alex Stiver Alexandra.Stiver@ipsos.com
Victoria Guyatt Victoria.Guyatt@ipsos.com
Roberto Cortese Roberto.Cortese@ipsos.com
Georgina Ngo Georgina.Ngo@ipsos.com

