



Ozempic: Miracle Drug or Mirage?

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In the past 6 years, obesity has gone from 13% to 43%. Why? Even worse, 93% of Americans have some form of metabolic dysfunction, whether it is pre-diabetes or Type 2 diabetes. There are over 1 billion obese people in the world and 2 billion overweight people. This is astonishing but also very sad and scary. Why? Basically, we are overindulging on sugar, refined carbohydrates, ultra-processed foods and starches and we are not active enough to burn all of these excess calories. Our ultra-processed foods are chemically-altered to stimulate dopamine, the “feel-good hormone.” Approximately 50-60% of dopamine is produced in the gut. To make matters worse, we are in the middle of a “body positivity movement.” Don’t misunderstand me, I am all for accepting ourselves and not trying to live up to some unhealthy media image. However, “healthy at any size” just isn’t true. There is always a price to pay for being overweight or obese. What is the solution to this obesity crisis? Is it bariatric surgery? Ozempic? Or could it be investigating the root cause of a person’s obesity? Let’s talk about Ozempic first so that we can eliminate this as a possible solution.

In 2017, the FDA approved Ozempic (semaglutide) to treat type 2 diabetes and to reduce the risk of cardiovascular-related issues. It quickly began to be used off-label for weight loss. In 2021, Wegovy (semaglutide) was approved for weight loss. In 2022, it was approved for weight loss for children as young as 12 years old! Where is the part where we teach them how to eat and go outside to play (and not video games)? Do these drugs work for weight loss? They most certainly do! However, there are risks to using these drugs, especially on a long-term basis.

Semaglutide is a glucagon-like peptide 1 or GLP-1 agonist. It stimulates the pancreas to release additional insulin in response to food and helps with fullness or satiety. It also slows

digestion by increasing the time it takes for food to leave the stomach and creating a quicker feeling of fullness. Short term side-effects of semaglutide include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea (50% of people). Long term, severe side effects (10% of people) can include bowel obstruction, gastroparesis, pancreatitis or even death. This is documented in JAMA 2023. In those that did experience weight loss, 40% was in the form of muscle mass loss. This is devastating, because our muscle IS our metabolism. Upon stopping the drug, patients experienced a weight re-gain of 65%. Here’s the problem.... If you lose all of that muscle, then any weight you re-gain will, most likely, be in the form of fat. This becomes less of a problem in those who eat sufficient amounts of protein and stimulate muscle growth with regular weight lifting. As of January, 2024, the FDA is evaluating reports of side effects such as hair loss (alopecia) and suicidal thoughts in patients taking Ozempic, Mounjaro and Wegovy. It is possible that these adverse effects did not appear during the drug development process. I guess the bottom line is that we must be sure that the benefits of these medications outweigh the possible risks.

What is the alternative? We can use the Functional Medicine approach to obesity by looking at the root cause. This can include toxic

substances in our food, ultra-processed foods, soy, wheat, corn and sugar. We can instead begin to add more nutrient-dense foods to our diets, ie. broccoli has more nutrients and less calories. We can also add more fiber in the form of nuts, seeds, berries and non-starchy veggies. The average American gets only 8 grams of fiber per day. The reality is that we need 30-50 gms. per day. Fiber helps to decrease insulin resistance, lower glucose levels, increase satiety and increase our own production of GLP-1 hormone. Increasing clean, lean protein also helps to keep us full and help rebuild skeletal muscle. Exercising 150 mins. per week including lifting weights at least three times per week. Proper sleep hygiene helps to increase leptin (satiety hormone) and decrease ghrelin (hunger hormone) and cortisol (stress hormone).

There is no denying that semaglutide drugs do help with weight loss, but my fear is that this misguided craze for these new drugs is resulting in more potentially dangerous health issues. If you are currently using them then you need a solid exit strategy from these drugs which should include a comprehensive lifestyle change, this includes looking at food, sleep, stress management, exercise and supplements. **This is Functional Medicine!**

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