

# Wegovy has arrived in the UK: The story of the weight-loss jab so far

September 6 2023, by Clint Witchalls

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In February 2021, *The Conversation* reported on a trial for a new weight-loss drug, called semaglutide, that was being hailed in the media as a "gamechanger." Gamechanger is a word used far too often by journalists to describe things that are, frankly, mundane. This time, though, the word seems apt.

In the past two and a half years, a lot of ink has been spilt discussing the merits and demerits of this drug—better known by its brand names Ozempic and Wegovy—including in *The Conversation*.

We start right at the very beginning, with a brutish-looking lizard, found in North American deserts, called the Gila monster. This reptile's venom—which causes excruciating and long-lasting pain—was the inspiration for the drug.

One of the compounds in the venom is similar to an appetite-suppressing hormone found in humans called GLP-1. Simon Cork, a senior lecturer in physiology, provides an excellent explanation of how the drug works.

Semaglutide was initially developed as a treatment for type 2 diabetes. The drug, developed by Novo Nordisk, is sold as Ozempic. Reports soon emerged of a curious side-effect in people prescribed the drug: dramatic and sustained weight loss. Studies soon confirmed these reports and a different formulation of the drug, called Wegovy, was developed for weight loss. It is a once-a-week jab.

## **The first real panacea?**

Being overweight or obese increases a person's risk of a range of

diseases, including [heart disease](#), stroke, various types of cancer, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, sleep apnoea and depression. Some have even suggested it might reduce the risk of dementia. If a [weight loss](#) jab can reduce the prevalence of all of these diseases, the impact on [public health](#) will be huge.

However, [early studies](#) looking at the actual impact on certain conditions, such as [heart failure](#), have failed to wow the experts. But, as scientists love to say, more research is needed.

Still, many people who are overweight or obese can't wait to get their hands on the drug. And with [52% of the world's population being in this category](#), that's a huge demand to fill. Novo Nordisk is struggling to meet demand. Shortages in the UK are expected to continue till 2024.

The first batches of the drug have just arrived in the UK, but there is a lot of disappointment. Most of the limited supply of jabs [will be going to online pharmacies](#), who sell the drug for around £300 for four weeks' supply.

Unfortunately, many unscrupulous vendors are selling illegal versions of the [drug](#) online. Whatever you do, don't be tempted to buy it from one of these vendors. You could do your health serious harm.

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