

Wegovy cuts heart risks by 20% in large trial

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In a finding that could change the landscape of heart disease care, the wildly popular weight-loss drug Wegovy has proved its mettle in protecting the heart after lowering the risk of cardiac problems in patients by 20%.

The results from this large, international study had been eagerly awaited by scientists and doctors alike. Why? It is the first to show that Wegovy's therapeutic powers may extend to the cardiovascular system, helping prevent a [heart](#) attack, stroke or a heart-related death in people who already have heart disease but not diabetes.

"It moves from a kind of therapy that reduces [body weight](#) to a therapy that reduces cardiovascular events," study author Dr. Michael Lincoff, vice chairman for research in the department of cardiovascular medicine at the Cleveland Clinic, told the *Associated Press*.

A high-dose version of the diabetes drug Ozempic, which already has been shown to lower the risk of heart problems in people who have diabetes, Wegovy seems to do the same for heart patients who don't have the blood sugar disease.

Dr. Francisco Lopez-Jimenez, a heart expert at the Mayo Clinic, told the *AP* that he believes the new findings will alter heart treatment guidelines and "dominate the conversation" for years to come.

"This is the population who needs the medicine the most," said Lopez-Jimenez, who wasn't involved in the research.

The results were published Saturday in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) and presented simultaneously at the American Heart Association's annual meeting in Philadelphia. Novo Nordisk, which makes both Wegovy and Ozempic, has already asked the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to include the heart benefits on Wegovy's label, as

it does on Ozempic's label.

More than 17,500 people in 41 countries were included in the company-funded study. Participants were 45 and older, had a [body mass index](#) of 27 or higher and were tracked for more than three years, on average. They took standard heart medications, but they were also randomly assigned to get weekly injections of either Wegovy or a dummy shot.

The study found that 6.5% of those who got the Wegovy shot had a [heart attack](#), stroke or died from a heart-related cause, while 8% of those who received a dummy shot did. That translated into an overall risk reduction of 20%.

As for [weight loss](#), those who took Wegovy lost about 9% of their body weight, while the [placebo group](#) lost less than 1%.

The Wegovy group also saw drops in key markers of [heart disease](#), including inflammation, cholesterol, blood sugars, [blood pressure](#) and [waist circumference](#), [Dr. Martha Gulati](#), a heart expert at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, told the *AP*. Interestingly, changes in those markers began before participants lost much weight.

"It means to me that it's more than just weight loss, how this drug works," said Gulati, who had no role in the study.

Still, "it remains unclear" whether the results were a side benefit of losing weight or a mechanism of the drug itself, an [editorial](#) accompanying the study noted.

Despite the added protection against heart troubles, about a third of all volunteers reported serious side effects. About 17% in the Wegovy group and about 8% in the comparison group left the study, mostly because of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and other gastrointestinal

problems.

Wegovy is part of a new class of injectable medications for obesity. Last week, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved [Zepbound](#), a version of the diabetes drug Mounjaro, for weight control. Both drugs are made by Eli Lilly.

Neither Wegovy or Zepbound are cheap: Monthly costs are about \$1,300 for Wegovy and about \$1,000 for Zepbound, the *AP* reported. And [insurance companies](#) and Medicare typically don't cover drugs that tackle weight loss alone, the *AP* reported.

But these latest findings and other research show obesity drugs directly tackle costly health problems, and that could shift the rules on coverage, former FDA Commissioner Dr. Mark McClellan told the *AP*.

More information: Visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for more on [Wegovy](#).

A. Michael Lincoff et al, Semaglutide and Cardiovascular Outcomes in Obesity without Diabetes, *New England Journal of Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa2307563](https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMoa2307563)

Amit Khera et al, SELECTing Treatments for Cardiovascular Disease—Obesity in the Spotlight, *New England Journal of Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1056/NEJMe2312646](https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMe2312646)

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