

# Weight-loss drug Zepbound eases sleep apnea in company trials

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Zepbound, one of the wildly popular weight-loss drugs that millions of Americans now take, eased sleep apnea in obese adults in two company trials, drug maker Eli Lilly announced Wednesday.

First [approved](#) to treat obesity by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration last November, Zepbound's power was significant: It reduced sleep apnea severity by nearly two-thirds in patients.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) "impacts 80 million adults in the U.S., with more than 20 million living with moderate-to-severe OSA. However, 85% of OSA cases go undiagnosed and therefore untreated," Dr. Jeff Emmick, senior vice president of product development at Lilly,

said in a company [news release](#) announcing the results.

"Addressing this unmet need head-on is critical, and while there are pharmaceutical treatments for the [excessive sleepiness](#) associated with OSA, tirzepatide [Zepbound] has the potential to be the first pharmaceutical treatment for the underlying disease," he added.

Importantly, the results have not yet been published in a [medical journal](#).

In the two studies, researchers looked at whether Zepbound worked better than a placebo in reducing how many times per hour, on average, a person partly or fully stopped breathing while sleeping.

In the first study, sleep apnea patients did not use CPAP ([continuous positive airway pressure](#)) machines, which blow air into the airway to keep it from collapsing during sleep. Patients in the second study did use the machines.

After 52 weeks, Zepbound prompted an average reduction of 27.4 events per hour in people who were not on PAP machines, compared to a reduction of 4.8 events per hour for people on a placebo.

In people who did use PAP machines, Zepbound led to an average reduction of 30.4 events per hour, compared to an average reduction of 6 events per hour in the placebo group.

Dr. Susan Spratt, an endocrinologist and senior medical director of the Population Health Management Office at Duke Health in North Carolina, said the findings show that obesity "is not a vanity issue."

"This is about treating a major health problem that reduces significant morbidity [illness] and mortality," she told NBC News.

She said the findings could also make [insurance companies](#) more willing to provide coverage for the weight-loss drug.

Just last month, Medicare said it would cover another popular weight-loss drug, Wegovy, [for obese patients who also have heart disease](#).

Sleep apnea affects about 39 million American adults, according to the [National Council on Aging](#). Obesity, which can narrow a person's airway, can up the chances of a sleep apnea diagnosis.

Left untreated, sleep apnea can lead to heart arrhythmias, heart failure and even death.

Lilly said Wednesday that it plans to share additional findings from the studies at the American Diabetes Association annual meeting in June, and it will also submit the results to the FDA sometime this summer.

**More information:** Visit the National Institutes of Health for more on [sleep apnea](#).

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