

Obesity in the American workforce and GLP-1 medications

What they are and how they work

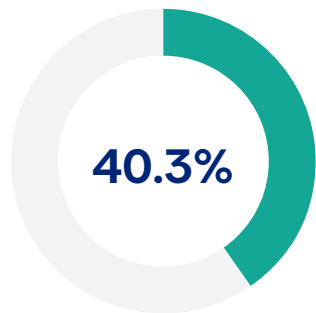
GLP-1 medications were initially developed to help manage blood sugar (glucose) levels in people with type 2 diabetes. However, these medications were also found to promote weight loss by:

- Lowering blood sugar by stimulating the production of insulin
- Curbing hunger
- Slowing the movement of food from the stomach into the small intestine



GLP-1 medications currently FDA-approved for weight loss

- Zepbound® (tirzepatide)
- Wegovy® (semaglutide)
- Saxenda® (liraglutide)



of US adults aged 20 years and older have obesity*



In 2022, **22 states** had an **adult obesity prevalence at or above 35%**, compared to 19 states in 2021

*Based on CDC data from August 2021–August 2023



Potential benefits in workers' comp

For obese and overweight workers, GLP-1 medications can provide significant benefits, such as faster injury recovery and reduced comorbidities.



Presurgical case study: Jeff

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- Obese worker injured on the job
- Diagnosed with a torn ACL in the knee
- Obesity can affect recovery after ACL reconstruction surgery
- Surgery is delayed until worker can lose weight
- GLP-1 medication is prescribed to help with weight loss



Post-injury case study: Cynthia

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- Previously healthy worker injured on the job
- Diagnosed with a spinal cord injury
- Obesity can develop following severe, debilitating injuries such as spinal cord injuries
- New-onset diabetes related to post-injury weight gain is determined to be compensable in the claim
- GLP-1 medication is prescribed for weight loss and diabetes management

Concerns for payers

Balancing these challenges with the potential benefits for injured workers is crucial for effective claims management.



Coverage decisions

No clear consensus exists on whether GLP-1 medications should be covered through workers' compensation. This uncertainty can lead to inconsistent coverage decisions and disputes.



Supply issues

Increasing demand for GLP-1 medications has resulted in supply shortages in the past, complicating consistent access for patients.



Cost

Costs of GLP-1 medications can reach up to \$1,500 per month, significantly increasing the cost of the claim.



Need for long-term use

GLP-1 medications are intended for extended use, requiring an ongoing financial commitment. If a GLP-1 medication is stopped without established behavioral modifications, weight gain is likely.



Side effects

Side effects of GLP-1 medications are common and may include nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, along with more severe conditions like pancreatitis and gastroparesis, which can complicate recovery and lead to added medical costs for the claim.



Alternative weight-loss strategies

- Dietary modifications and possible nutritional supplements
- Routine exercise program
- Non GLP-1 medications for diabetes and weight loss
- Counseling and behavioral therapy

Pipeline of future weight-loss medications

2025

Oral Semaglutide Oral

- GLP-1 agonist
- Novo Nordisk

(Novo Nordisk has been silent on updated plans for Rybelsus for obesity – unclear when/if they will file for the new indication)

2027

Survodutide SC Injection

- GLP-1/glucagon agonist
- Boehringer Ingelheim (2Q 2027)

Retatrutide SC Injection

- GLP-1/glucagon agonist
- Eli Lilly (4Q 2027)

2026

**Cagrilintide/semaglutide
CagriSema/SC Injection**

- GLP-1/amylin agonist
- Novo Nordisk (early 2026)

Orforglipron Oral

- GLP-1 agonist
- Eli Lilly (4Q 2026)

2028 or later

**Maridebart cafraglutide (MariTide)
SC Injection – monthly**

- GLP-1 agonist, GIP antagonist
- Amgen

GSBR-1290 Oral

- GLP-1 agonist
- Structure Therapeutics

VK2735 Oral

- GLP-1 agonist
- Viking Therapeutics

RG-6641 SC Injection

- GLP-1/GIP agonist
- Roche

S-309309 Oral

- MGAT2 inhibitor
- Shionogi

K-757, K-833 Oral

- Nutrient receptor agonist
- Kallyope

Pemvidutide SC Injection

- GLP-1/Glucagon agonist
- Altimmune



Key takeaways

How to manage GLP-1 medications in workers' comp claims

What should an adjuster do when they receive a request for a GLP-1 medication?

Don't go it alone. There are many different angles to evaluate, and each claim and injured worker represent a unique situation. Work with your PBM, who will engage the right clinical and regulatory experts to evaluate the injured worker's situation.

Contributing factors

- Formulary controls
- GLP-1 medication treatment duration
- Supporting therapies and resources
- Legal and court implications
- State regulations
- Return-to-work expectations



GLP-1 medications have significant potential, but they are powerful and costly medications. Ongoing engagement with your PBM can help promote the shared goals of ensuring that a GLP-1 medication will be beneficial for the injured worker and will be appropriately managed within the workers' comp claim.

Emmerich, S., Fryar, C., Stierman, B., & Ogden, C. [Obesity and Severe Obesity Prevalence in Adults: United States, August 2021–August 2023](#). CDC National Center for Health Statistics; September 2024.

[Adult Obesity Prevalence Remains High: Support for Prevention and Treatment Needed](#). CDC Newsroom Press Release; September 21, 2023.