

New weight-loss drug causes scandal, negative body image

By **Caroline Berry**

editor-in-chief

Recent scandals have emerged regarding the popular drug Ozempic, with claims that it is causing negative side effects in users. This injectable medication is primarily used to help lower blood sugar levels in people with type 2 diabetes but has surged in popularity as a weight-loss drug. Reports of adverse reactions have led to concerns about the safety and effectiveness of Ozempic.

One of the most concerning aspects of Ozempic is its potential side effects. Many users have reported experiencing nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal pain after taking the drug. These symptoms can make it difficult for people to adhere to their treatment regimen. In some cases, these side effects can be severe enough to require medical intervention or even hospitalization.

Furthermore, there have been reports of more serious side effects associated with Ozempic, including pancreatitis and thyroid cancer. While these are rare occurrences, they are still cause for concern among healthcare providers and patients alike. Pancreatitis can be a life-threatening condition that requires immediate medical attention, while thyroid cancer can have long-term consequences for a person's health and wellbeing.

Another issue with Ozempic is the way it has been tested and approved for use. The drug was initially approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) based on the results of clinical trials that were conducted by the manufacturer, Novo Nordisk. This raises questions about the reliability and accuracy of the data used to support the drug's approval. Independent studies have not been conducted to verify the safety and effectiveness of

Ozempic, leaving many healthcare providers and patients in the dark about its potential risks.

Additionally, the testing of Ozempic may not accurately reflect its

real-world effects. Clinical trials often have strict inclusion criteria that exclude certain populations, such as elderly people or those with certain medical conditions. This means that the results of these trials may not generalize to the broader population of individuals who will ultimately be prescribed the drug. As a result, the full extent of Ozempic's side effects may not be known until it has been used by a wider range of people.

Another extreme risk of taking Ozempic is an increased risk of malnutrition. Some doctors say it is important that people are given clear guidance on proper diet and nutrition while on the medication. People who experience extreme outcomes from the medication may need to stop taking it altogether.

"Some people taking Ozempic can experience such intense lack of appetite that they do become malnourished," Dr. Andrew Kraftson, a clinical associate professor in the division of metabolism, endocrinology and diabetes at Michigan Medicine, said.

Ozempic works, in part, by blocking the brain's hunger signals, suppressing appetite; it also causes the stomach to empty more slowly, leading people to feel full for longer. When people are on a drug like Ozempic, doctors need to monitor them closely with regular check-ins. Typically a daily caloric intake between 1,000 and 1,500 calories (individualized based on a person's starting weight and estimated metabolism) is recommended.

In addition to the potential health risks associated with Ozempic, there is also a negative effect on body image that can result from taking this medication. Many Ozempic-users struggle to manage their body image due to the inconsistent and erratic results that the drug provides. This result many negative impacts to users' mental health including feelings of shame, guilt, and inadequacy. By equating weight loss with success and health, Ozempic contributes to unrealistic and unhealthy body standards that can harm people's self-esteem.

Many Ozempic-users have found themselves frustrated with the result of their weight loss plateauing after a certain amount of time on Ozempic. This often prevents people who are on Ozempic to try and lose weight

from meeting their goal.

"Most people taking these medications will hit a plateau around the 18-month mark after starting treatment," Kraftson said.

Medications like Ozempic mimic a naturally occurring hormone and slow the emptying of the stomach, so that we feel fuller, faster and for longer. They also target the areas of the brain that regulate appetite, curbing cravings.

But there are still open questions about exactly how they work, and that extends to why some people hit a set point at one weight or another. Furthermore, not everyone responds to these kinds of medications in the same way. A small proportion of those who take these drugs won't lose weight at all.

"If you think about it, that's a good thing," said Dr. Robert Gabbay, the chief scientific and medical officer of the American Diabetes Association. "It would be dangerous if you just kept losing weight."

Additionally, a scandal emerged towards the end of 2023 regarding counterfeit Ozempic medications being put on the market. The Food and Drug Administration (F.D.A.) said that it had seized thousands of units of counterfeit Ozempic on Dec. 21, 2023. Some fraudulent Ozempic products may still be on the market, according to the agency. The agency has also confirmed that the needles accompanying these injectable medications are counterfeit and may not be sterile. The labels, the packaging and the accompanying information for patients and health care providers are also all fraudulent. The F.D.A. shared photos of the fake injectors and encouraged patients to check their medication for signs that it could be counterfeit. For example, a real Ozempic needle should be covered by a paper tab that reads "NovoFine Plus," while the counterfeit needles found so far simply say "NovoFine." Consumers can also

compare the lot and serial number of the medication with those of the counterfeit drugs, or ask a pharmacist for help identifying that information.

Unfortunately, shortages can drive pharmacies to buy from distributors they may not be familiar with, putting them at risk of buying counterfeits. Ozempic and similar drugs have faced supply challenges over recent months. While the F.D.A. has strengthened its systems to trace and verify drugs across

supply chain, criminal distributors have become increasingly skilled at making fake medications that can bypass those barriers. This counterfeit Ozempic has caused a plethora of problems for its users.

"Several people in Austria were hospitalized after using counterfeit Ozempic, and 11 people in Lebanon developed dangerously low blood sugar after taking medication that was believed to be fake," researcher Lee Smith said. There are also concerns about the risk of counterfeit Ozempic coming from sources outside that supply chain. The agency has urged people to acquire their medication from state-licensed pharmacies. In general, experts say, it is wise to always obtain Ozempic with a prescription and to be wary of drugs claiming to be Ozempic for sale at a far lower cost than the roughly \$900 list price of the brand-name version. Overall, the negative effects of Ozempic cannot be ignored. From the potentially dangerous side effects to the questionable testing and approval process to the counterfeit scandal to the harmful impact on body image, this drug raises serious concerns about its safety and effectiveness. Healthcare providers and patients should exercise caution when considering the use of Ozempic and carefully weigh the potential benefits against the known risks. Ultimately, the health and well-being of individuals should be the top priority when it comes to managing type 2 diabetes and weight loss.



THE OUTRAGE OVER OZEMPIC