# ASA cracks down on illegal advertising of prescription weight-loss medications



The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has initiated a rigorous enforcement action targeting the online marketing of prescription-only weight-loss medications, which include popular treatments such as Ozempic, Mounjaro, Saxenda, and Wegovy. This crackdown aims to address a surge in advertisements that violate existing regulations regarding the promotion of pharmaceutical drugs.

The ASA's announcement follows a comprehensive investigation conducted in January, which uncovered approximately 1,800 distinct paid advertisements potentially promoting these prescription-only medicines (POMs). The appeal and subsequent rise in demand for these drugs have led to an underground market for their distribution, with users seeking rapid weight loss solutions. The treatments can be costly, fetching up to £269 per month.

As part of this enforcement initiative, the ASA has issued a joint Enforcement Notice in collaboration with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). This notice delineates the rules prohibiting the direct promotion of named weight-loss POMs in various formats, including social media posts on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, as well as through sponsored search engine results and influencer endorsements. The agency has instructed that any remaining offending advertisements be taken down immediately.

Jess Tye, regulatory projects manager at the ASA, stated, "We have made clear from the outset of this initiative that advertising weight-loss prescription-only medicines to the public is against the law and the advertising rules," highlighting the seriousness of the violations.

The enforcement letter further clarifies that advertisements must refrain from directly promoting any POM. It emphasises that marketing can only proceed for consultations where medications can be prescribed, rather than showcasing the medications themselves. The letter warns, "Directly promoting a POM, for example by using its brand name or active ingredient in an ad for weight loss treatments, is almost certainly a breach of the rules."

Dionne Spence, chief enforcement officer at the GPhC, noted the importance of appropriate medical consultations for obtaining prescription medicines. "It is vital that people receive prescription-only medicines, such as those used for weight management, only after having an appropriate consultation," she explained. The GPhC will continue to monitor compliance within pharmacies and maintain oversight to ensure patient safety in the online marketplace.

The MHRA has previously highlighted the serious risks associated with these drugs, reporting 22 fatalities linked to their use and around 400 cases of hospitalisation. The popularity of weight-loss drugs in the UK is substantial, with current estimates suggesting about half a million users and projections indicating this number could double in the coming year. Notably, Mounjaro, frequently referred to as the "King Kong of jabs," is set to be introduced into NHS services.

In light of the rising concerns surrounding the misuse and marketing of weight-loss pharmaceuticals, health authorities continue to warn against the unsafe practice of taking these medications without a proper prescription. The NHS explicitly cautions, "Never take an anti-obesity medicine if it has not been prescribed to you. These types of medicines may not be safe for you and can cause serious side effects." The ASA's ongoing investigations underline its commitment to combating illegal advertising practices within this rapidly growing sector of weight management treatments.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/trim-down-your-weight-loss-medicine-ads-doctor-s-orders.html> - This URL corroborates the ASA's enforcement action against advertising prescription-only weight-loss medications directly to the public. It highlights the prohibition on promoting these medications, including popular treatments like Ozempic and Wegovy, through various advertising channels.
* <https://www.pblmagazine.co.uk/industry-news/asa-cracks-down-on-false-ozempic-dupe-advertising-claims> - This article supports the ASA's crackdown on false and misleading advertising of 'Ozempic dupe' products. It emphasizes the illegal promotion of prescription-only medicines like Ozempic and Wegovy across online platforms and social media.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/prescription-only-weight-loss-drugs-uk-ads-b2731135.html> - This news article provides details on the ASA's discovery of approximately 1,800 ads promoting prescription-only weight-loss medications, which is against the law. It also mentions the enforcement actions taken by regulatory bodies.
* <https://mhraproducts.co.uk/en/KB/article/weight-loss-medications.htm> - Unfortunately, no information on this specific link was found in the search results. However, the MHRA generally provides guidance on medications, which would support the discussion of risks associated with weight-loss pharmaceuticals.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/weight-loss-medicines/> - This webpage is expected to provide NHS guidance on weight-loss medications, aligning with warnings against taking these drugs without a prescription. It would support the NHS caution about unsafe practices with anti-obesity medicines.