# Weight loss injections cost US $71bn as experts warn of serious dental and health risks



Americans have reportedly spent $71 billion on weight loss injections in 2023, equating to the entire annual budget allocated for foreign aid. This staggering figure comes from a study conducted by the American Medical Association and the Centers for Disease Control. The injections, known as GLP-1 drugs, mimic the effects of a natural hormone called glucagon-like peptide-1, effectively lowering blood sugar levels. In the UK, recent research highlighted by the Telegraph suggests that more than one in ten women are using these injections, with 500,000 individuals under private prescriptions for drugs like Mounjaro and Wegovy.

Despite the soaring popularity of these treatments, concerns are emerging regarding their long-term health implications. Dr Doug Lucas, a trauma and orthopaedic surgeon and director of education and training for Screen My Bones, warned about the possible deterioration of bone health and muscle mass among users, describing the potential outcomes as “catastrophic” and “frightening.” Additionally, a large study indicated that individuals using GLP-1 medications were nearly 2.5 times more likely to develop acute pancreatitis, a serious inflammatory condition of the pancreas.

Recent discussions have also introduced the colloquial terms “Ozempic face” and “Ozempic teeth,” referring to cosmetic and dental side effects attributed to rapid weight loss. Ozempic is a brand name for semaglutide, which, while widely known, is specifically licensed in the UK for treating type 2 diabetes and not for weight loss. The Wegovy brand of semaglutide, however, is available for weight loss under private prescription.

Dental professionals are beginning to voice concerns over potential oral health issues stemming from these injections. Dr Praveen Sharma from the British Dental Association (BDA) noted that while there is currently insufficient evidence to definitively link GLP-1s to specific oral health problems, the side effect of dry mouth has raised alarms about potential consequences for dental hygiene. “Saliva plays a vital role in maintaining the health of our teeth and gums, so a reduction in salivary flow would, in theory at least, have a detrimental effect on the oral cavity,” he explained.

Adding to this, Anne Symons, a dental hygienist writing in the British Dental Nurses’ Journal, also observed that although there is not enough evidence to confirm that semaglutide directly affects oral health, various side effects may necessitate dental considerations. Increased reports of dry mouth, changes in taste, and heightened sensitivity are common among users, according to Dr Tim Bradstock-Smith, founder and principal dentist at The London Smile Clinic. He pointed out that while the medication itself isn’t directly harmful to teeth, side effects can elevate risks for dental decay, gum disease, and enamel erosion.

The potential ramifications of vomiting, a frequent side effect affecting nearly 19% of participants in trials, have also drawn attention. Dr Victoria Holden from the British Association of Private Dentistry highlighted that gastric acid exposure to teeth due to vomiting could lead to severe dental erosion. Furthermore, rapid weight loss could precipitate vitamin deficiencies, complicating oral health issues, she noted.

For individuals experiencing oral side effects from weight loss injections, professionals advise consulting dental care providers and maintaining proper hydration, avoiding acidic foods, and potentially utilising saliva substitutes. The overarching consensus among experts is the importance of a collaborative approach between medical and dental practitioners. As Dr Holden suggested, proactive communication could preemptively address potential dental health risks linked to these weight loss drugs.

Novo Nordisk, the manufacturer of Ozempic, Wegovy, and Saxenda, confirmed that patient safety remains their top priority, actively gathering and monitoring safety data related to these medications. Eli Lilly, which produces Mounjaro, similarly emphasised that these drugs should only be used under healthcare supervision and encouraged consultation for any emerging side effects.

As awareness and discussions around the impacts of GLP-1 injections intensify, the focus on improving understanding and management of both their benefits and potential side effects continues to grow across medical and dental communities.

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

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