# Weight loss injections could boost UK economy by £4.5bn a year, study finds



According to a recent study presented at the European Congress on Obesity in Málaga, Spain, introducing weight loss injections to all eligible individuals in the UK could potentially enhance the economy by as much as £4.5 billion annually. The research focused on the effects of semaglutide, a medication commonly known as Wegovy and Ozempic, and analysed data from 2,660 participants suffering from obesity and/or type 2 diabetes. The findings revealed that recipients of semaglutide were able to increase their working days by an average of five, alongside contributing an additional 12 days of unpaid work, such as childcare and volunteering. This overall boost in productivity was reflected in an estimated net annual productivity gain of £1,127 per individual.

This significant economic projection is highly relevant considering that obesity and related conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, currently burden the UK economy with costs approximating £100 billion per year. Notably, semaglutide has been linked to a reduced risk of numerous health issues, but its impact on productivity and quality of life has only recently begun to be fully recognised. The expanded productivity and social contributions among those receiving treatment could translate to about £4.31 billion for individuals categorised as severely obese and an additional £200 million for those with type 2 diabetes eligible for NHS coverage. NHS guidelines recommend semaglutide for patients with a BMI of 35 or above, alongside a weight-related health condition.

Robert King, a senior health economist and co-author of the research, stressed the broader societal implications of weight loss injections. He pointed out that even minor productivity improvements per individual could accumulate to have a substantial impact at the population level. “Treating these chronic diseases at scale, prioritising them for treatment is really important,” King stated, emphasising that effective interventions could lead to substantial economic and quality of life improvements.

However, despite the promising economic benefits, challenges remain surrounding the accessibility of such treatments. Naveed Sattar, a professor of cardiometabolic medicine at the University of Glasgow, cautioned that the high cost of semaglutide means the total expenses for medications may outweigh the potential health and societal benefits in the short term. Sattar remarked that current circumstances necessitate the restriction of treatment to those in the greatest need, where the health gains are most likely to provide financial returns and enhance productivity.

The debate surrounding the cost and accessibility of weight loss treatments is particularly pertinent given the disproportionate impact of obesity on lower-income communities. A recent report revealed that the economic burden of obesity significantly eclipses the cost of innovative weight-loss medications, reinforcing the compelling case for their broader use as a public health strategy. As Wes Streeting, the Health Secretary, articulated: “These drugs could have colossal clout in our fight to tackle obesity and in turn get unemployed Britons back to work, and we will carefully consider the results of this important research.”

Moreover, the financial implications of enhanced productivity extend beyond individual benefit; they could shift the economic landscape in various sectors. For instance, lighter passenger weights resulting from widespread weight loss could lead to substantial fuel savings for airlines, with estimates suggesting that United Airlines alone could save around $80 million if average passenger weights decreased by a mere 4.5 kg. The overall market for GLP-1 agonists, the classification that includes semaglutide, is anticipated to reach $715.1 million by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 17.7% over the next five years, further illustrating the shifting tides in healthcare economics linked to obesity treatments.

As the UK grapples with the multifaceted challenges posed by obesity, the potential of weight loss medications like semaglutide to inspire economic rejuvenation is becoming increasingly apparent. Yet, the path ahead necessitates balanced consideration of both individual and collective health outcomes, inclusivity in treatment access, and sustained public health investment to mitigate obesity’s vast economic impacts.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraphs 1, 2
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 4, 6

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/09/weight-loss-jabs-bolster-uk-economy-study-semaglutide> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/09/weight-loss-jabs-bolster-uk-economy-study-semaglutide> - A study presented at the European Congress on Obesity in Málaga, Spain, found that providing semaglutide to all eligible individuals could boost the UK economy by £4.5 billion annually. The research, involving 2,660 participants with obesity and/or type 2 diabetes, revealed that semaglutide users gained an average of five extra working days and 12 days of unpaid work, such as volunteering or childcare, leading to a net productivity gain of £1,127 per person. This translates to £4.31 billion for those with severe obesity and £200 million for individuals with type 2 diabetes eligible for NHS treatment. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommends semaglutide for patients with a BMI of at least 35 and one weight-related condition.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/sep/22/health-productivity-losses-obesity-weight-loss-jab-costs> - A report indicates that the annual cost of obesity in the UK, estimated at £100 billion, far exceeds the cost of new weight-loss drugs like Ozempic. The report, shared with The Guardian, highlights that the economic burden of obesity, including healthcare costs and productivity losses, is significantly higher than the expenses associated with these medications, making a compelling case for their use.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2024/oct/20/from-fashion-to-the-food-industry-11-ways-that-weight-loss-drugs-have-changed-the-world> - The rise of semaglutide has had unexpected economic impacts, including on the airline industry. Analysts predict that lighter passengers could lead to fuel savings, with United Airlines potentially saving $80 million if average passenger weights decreased by 4.5 kg. Additionally, Denmark's economy benefits from Novo Nordisk, the maker of Wegovy and Ozempic, which is valued higher than the country's annual GDP. The publication of fitness and diet books has also declined, with sales dropping by 14% in the UK in 2023, compared to a 2% fall across the market.
5. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/horizon/outlook/glp-1-agonists-weight-loss-drugs-market/uk> - The UK GLP-1 agonists weight loss drugs market is projected to reach a revenue of $715.1 million by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17.7% from 2025 to 2030. Semaglutide (Wegovy) was the largest revenue-generating drug in 2024, and tirzepatide (Zepbound) is expected to be the fastest-growing segment during the forecast period.
6. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/horizon/outlook/glp-1-receptor-agonist-market/uk> - The UK GLP-1 receptor agonist market is expected to reach a projected revenue of $2,298.2 million by 2030, with a CAGR of 16% from 2025 to 2030. Ozempic (semaglutide) was the largest revenue-generating product in 2023, and other products are anticipated to register the fastest growth during the forecast period.
7. <https://www.healthpolicypartnership.com/are-weight-loss-treatments-contributing-to-health-inequalities/> - The Health Policy Partnership discusses concerns that the high cost of weight-loss treatments like GLP-1 agonists may exacerbate health inequalities. With low-income families disproportionately affected by obesity, the two-tiered system of access to these treatments could widen the gap in health outcomes between the wealthiest and the poorest individuals, at least in the short term.