# Dr David Kessler highlights limits and promise of GLP-1 drugs amid ultra-processed food crisis



The journey of weight management and the quest for effective solutions has recently gained renewed attention with the emergence of GLP-1 drugs, which were initially developed for diabetes but have now become sought-after interventions for obesity. Dr David Kessler, former head of the FDA and a staunch advocate for healthier eating, shared his personal experiences with GLP-1 medications, recounting significant weight loss and profound changes in his relationship with food. After months of using these drugs, he lost over 65 pounds, subsequently experiencing improved blood pressure and blood glucose levels. This experience, however, was not without discomfort; Kessler noted side effects ranging from chills to nausea, yet maintains that the benefits outweighed these inconveniences.

Kessler’s narrative underscores a broader dialogue about the nature of cravings and food addiction, especially in a world saturated with ultra-processed foods designed to elicit compulsive consumption. He describes these foods as “ultraformulated,” engineered to hijack the brain's reward systems, prompting an incessant cycle of cravings. This reengineering of food consumption presents a stark contrast to the natural foods that traditionally satiate our hunger without triggering the same powerful neurological responses. The excessive availability and marketing of these energy-dense foods over the past century have altered how our bodies cope with energy intake. Indeed, Kessler argues that food addiction – though long avoided by many in scientific discourse for fear of stigma – is a legitimate struggle stemming from our biological responses to these engineered foods.

The increasing popularity of GLP-1 drugs, such as semaglutide and tirzepatide, has sparked a surge in prescriptions, particularly for older populations facing severe obesity. While these drugs can effectively reduce appetite and lead to substantial weight loss, concerns about their long-term efficacy and safety have emerged. Research indicates that an alarming two-thirds of patients regain lost weight within a year of discontinuation. Kessler warns against viewing these drugs as lifelong solutions, noting potential side effects—including nausea, delayed gastric emptying, and risks associated with long-term use—that patients need to consider carefully.

Moreover, critics of the GLP-1 approach highlight that the focus on weight loss can overshadow the importance of metabolic health. A shift towards reducing visceral fat, which is closely linked to health complications such as cardiovascular disease and certain types of cancer, could provide a more rounded understanding of obesity treatment. Despite their high costs and some negative health impacts, GLP-1 drugs represent a significant leap in the pharmacological management of obesity. Yet their extensive use raises essential questions about whether these medications truly address the root causes of obesity or simply offer a temporary reprieve from a much larger societal issue.

The food industry, with its unrelenting promotion of ultra-processed options, plays a significant role in the obesity epidemic. Kessler argues for a necessary reformation in how we produce and consume food, voicing concerns that many companies have turned their focus away from nourishing diets. He calls for a cultural shift—an awakening to the fact that ultraformulated foods are akin to a modern-day tobacco, contributing to an ongoing public health crisis.

As Kessler continues to navigate his ongoing struggle with weight management, he emphasises the importance of combining pharmaceutical interventions like GLP-1s with lifestyle changes. Effective management of cravings and a return to nutrient-rich foods can help mitigate the reliance on drugs and promote healthier habits overall. Adaptation to challenges, such as fluctuating appetite and the temptation of high-calorie snacks, demand ongoing diligence. He notes that his experience with a continuous glucose monitor illuminated how his blood sugar levels were influenced by diet, prompting a shift towards low-carb eating to help regulate his cravings.

Ultimately, the discussion around GLP-1 drugs and their efficacy is not merely a conversation about weight but an exploration of broader health implications. As Kessler points out, leveraging all tools available—including pharmaceutical options, dietary adjustments, and behavioural modifications—can yield improvements in health that once seemed unattainable. Yet, the battle against ultra-processed foods remains crucial. Until society confronts this pervasive issue, true progress toward health and well-being may remain elusive.

**##Reference Map:**

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14750669/weight-loss-jabs-ultra-processed-food-brains-DR-DAVID-KESSLER-health.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2025/05/obesity-glp1-weight-visceral-fat/682784/?utm_source=apple_news)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14750669/weight-loss-jabs-ultra-processed-food-brains-DR-DAVID-KESSLER-health.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-future-of-health-care-88241cb0-c91c-11ef-8caa-9b85ccf20e96), [[6]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/science/article/2024/06/21/obesity-treatment-is-undergoing-a-revolution_6675403_10.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://time.com/7207986/health-risks-benefits-weight-loss-drugs-ozempic-wegovy/), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/6eab6399-80f9-4fa0-9eb4-6ea8c5401ba7)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2025/05/obesity-glp1-weight-visceral-fat/682784/?utm_source=apple_news), [[6]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/science/article/2024/06/21/obesity-treatment-is-undergoing-a-revolution_6675403_10.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14750669/weight-loss-jabs-ultra-processed-food-brains-DR-DAVID-KESSLER-health.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://time.com/7207986/health-risks-benefits-weight-loss-drugs-ozempic-wegovy/), [[4]](https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-future-of-health-care-88241cb0-c91c-11ef-8caa-9b85ccf20e96)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14750669/weight-loss-jabs-ultra-processed-food-brains-DR-DAVID-KESSLER-health.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://time.com/7278429/weight-loss-obesity-pill-eli-lilly/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/6eab6399-80f9-4fa0-9eb4-6ea8c5401ba7), [[6]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/science/article/2024/06/21/obesity-treatment-is-undergoing-a-revolution_6675403_10.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14750669/weight-loss-jabs-ultra-processed-food-brains-DR-DAVID-KESSLER-health.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2025/05/obesity-glp1-weight-visceral-fat/682784/?utm_source=apple_news> - This article discusses the effectiveness of GLP-1 drugs, originally developed for diabetes, in weight loss. It highlights concerns about their high cost, potential side effects like nausea, and the need for lifelong use. The piece argues that the focus should shift from mere weight loss to improving metabolic health, particularly by reducing visceral fat, which is linked to serious health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. The article also critiques the reliance on BMI as a metric for prescribing GLP-1s and advocates for better diagnostic tools to assess insulin resistance and visceral fat.
3. <https://time.com/7207986/health-risks-benefits-weight-loss-drugs-ozempic-wegovy/> - This article examines the health risks and benefits of GLP-1 receptor agonists like Wegovy and Zepbound, which are used for weight loss. A study led by Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly found that these drugs lower the risk of Alzheimer's, addiction, seizures, heart conditions, and infections. However, they also increase the risk of gastrointestinal issues, low blood pressure, arthritis, and certain kidney and pancreatic conditions. The findings underscore the need for continuous research to fully understand these effects and suggest that new drug formulations targeting additional hormones may offer even greater benefits in the future.
4. <https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-future-of-health-care-88241cb0-c91c-11ef-8caa-9b85ccf20e96> - This article explores the ongoing debate over obesity treatment, focusing on the use of GLP-1 drugs. While these drugs are effective, they are expensive and do not address the root causes of obesity. The piece highlights the surge in GLP-1 prescriptions, particularly among individuals aged 55-65, and discusses the moral dilemma of treating obesity with medication without making environmental changes. Experts agree that while lifestyle changes are ideal, they are often unrealistic due to the entrenched nature of unhealthy environments.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/6eab6399-80f9-4fa0-9eb4-6ea8c5401ba7> - This article examines the impact of weight-loss drugs like Ozempic on eating habits and the restaurant industry. It contrasts the hedonistic eating of the past with today's health-conscious trend, where increasing health concerns have led to the popularity of drugs that reduce appetite. The rise of these drugs has resulted in decreased spending on food and changes in tastes towards healthier options. The piece also explores the potential for 'Ozempic restaurants' catering to reduced appetites and the broader implications for the future of dining and food culture.
6. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/science/article/2024/06/21/obesity-treatment-is-undergoing-a-revolution_6675403_10.html> - This article discusses the transformation in obesity treatment through new medications like Wegovy, a GLP-1 agonist drug. It highlights the case of a 50-year-old man who lost 25 kilos in eight months and regained satiety, improving his eating habits. The piece notes that while GLP-1 agonists have shown unprecedented weight loss results, their long-term efficacy and safety remain uncertain. It also addresses the rise of obesity worldwide, driving the demand for such treatments, and the challenges related to the cost and accessibility of these therapies.
7. <https://time.com/7278429/weight-loss-obesity-pill-eli-lilly/> - This article covers Eli Lilly's development of orforglipron, a new oral diabetes and weight-loss drug based on the GLP-1 hormone. The piece highlights promising trial data showing effective blood sugar control and weight loss comparable to injectable therapies like Mounjaro, without serious side effects such as liver issues. If approved, orforglipron could be the first oral GLP-1 drug approved for weight loss, offering greater accessibility and no dietary restrictions. The article also discusses Lilly's broader strategy to accelerate innovation and improve manufacturing processes.