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Weight-Loss Drug Wegovy Also Works Against Heart Failure

Medicine eased symptoms of condition that can cause fatigue and shortness of breath

By Peter Loftus [Follow](#)

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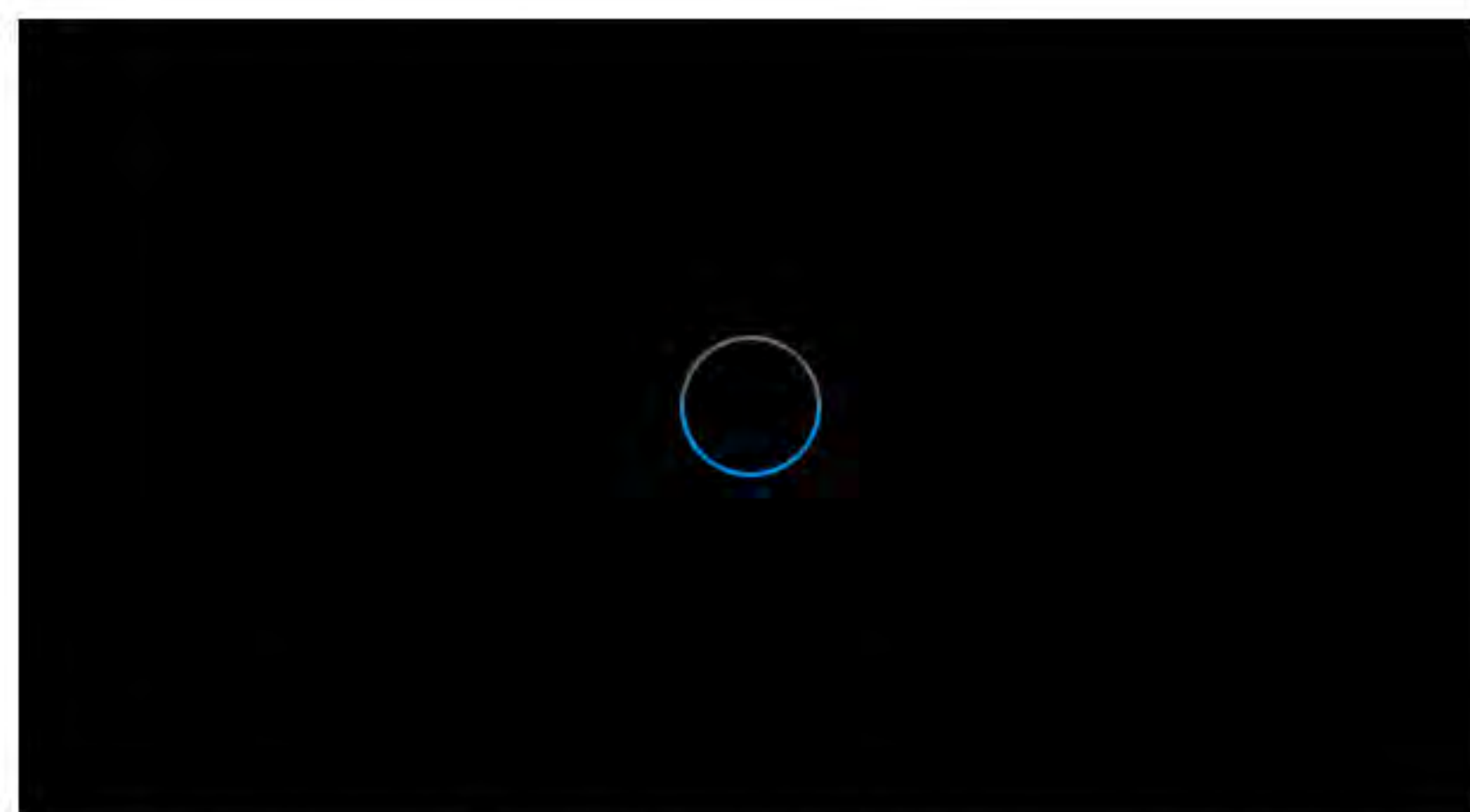
Only one Wegovy user was hospitalized or had an urgent visit for heart failure, compared with 12 in the placebo group. PHOTO: STEFFEN TRUMPF/ZUMA PRESS

There is new evidence that a [popular weight-loss drug](#) can deliver health benefits beyond shedding pounds.

[Novo Nordisk's NVO 0.57%](#) [▲](#) [anti-obesity drug Wegovy](#) eased the symptoms of a common form of heart failure in patients who also have obesity, researchers reported Friday.

The patients who took the once-weekly injection for a year reported improvements in fatigue and shortness of breath, and found they could walk longer distances, all while losing an average of 13% of their body weight.

The results, published online in the New England Journal of Medicine and presented at the annual meeting of the European Society of Cardiology in Amsterdam, provide further proof that Wegovy, its cousin Ozempic and similar drugs can do more than just help people lose weight.



Diabetes drugs could become an effective way to treat behavioral issues and addiction. WSJ's Daniela Hernandez breaks down the science on how they work and how they could change psychiatry forever. Photo illustration: Elizabeth Smelov

The class is already a go-to for diabetes treatment. Earlier this month, Novo Nordisk said a separate study showed that Wegovy [cut the risk of heart attacks and stroke](#) in overweight people without diabetes.

Researchers are evaluating other potential health benefits. Novo Nordisk, [Eli Lilly LLY 0.05%](#) [▲](#) and other companies also are studying the effects of the drugs on conditions including sleep apnea and liver disease.

Lilly makes Mounjaro, another drug in the class that reduces blood sugar and suppresses appetite by mimicking gut hormones, including one known as GLP-1.

Extra health benefits could increase pressure on more U.S. [employers and health insurers](#) to pay for the weight-loss drugs, which have been in high demand even though they list for as much as \$1,350 a month.

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More than six million Americans have heart failure, a condition in which the heart doesn't pump blood well. It causes fatigue and shortness of breath, can limit a person's ability to perform everyday tasks, and can lead to hospitalizations and deaths.

People with obesity have a higher risk of developing a kind of heart failure called preserved ejection fraction. This means their hearts pump out a normal percentage of blood, but stiffness in the muscle limits the overall volume of blood pumped.

Doctors have observed that losing weight can alleviate the symptoms.

In the latest Wegovy study, researchers enrolled nearly 530 of the heart-failure patients. Half took Wegovy, and the other half a placebo.

At the end of the study, people taking Wegovy had an improvement on a questionnaire assessing heart-failure symptoms that was nearly twice as large as the placebo group.

The Wegovy patients also were able to walk 21 meters farther in six minutes than at the start of the study, compared with only a 1.2-meter improvement in the placebo group.

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Wegovy "has the real potential to be a fundamental paradigm shift in how we manage obesity patients with this type of heart failure," said Dr. Mikhail Kosiborod, a cardiologist at St. Luke's Mid America Heart Institute in Kansas City, Mo., who led the study.

Only one Wegovy user was hospitalized or had an urgent visit for heart failure, compared with 12 in the placebo group, though the study wasn't designed to thoroughly measure the drug's effect on hospitalizations.

As in previous studies and real-world use, Wegovy came with gut-related side effects. Wegovy users had fewer serious adverse events of any type than placebo patients, who experienced more cardiac problems.

Denmark-based Novo Nordisk plans to submit the study results to U.S. and European health authorities in 2024, pending the outcome of a separate study, in hopes of getting permission to promote the heart-failure benefits of Wegovy.

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