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Reimagining Weight Management: **Balanced Benefits for the GLP-1 Era**

Opportunities to meet consumers wherever they are on their journey to improved health continue to expand.

By Sean Moloughney,
Editor

Obesity is a serious, common, and costly chronic disease affecting more than two in five American adults, according to the CDC.

The problem has only compounded over time. A review of over 51 billion commercial healthcare claim records from FAIR Health found the percentage of U.S. adult patients with a diagnosis of overweight or obesity increased from 10.4% in 2019 to 15.7% in 2024, a

relative increase of 50.7%. Many more adults go undiagnosed.

This article in a nutshell:

- Historic Struggles with Weight ... and UPFs
- GLP-1 Surges onto the Scene
- Muscle Health
- Functional Foods and Nutritional Needs
- Managing Expectations
- Guardrails for Prebiotic Claims
- Looking Ahead

At the same time, the percentage of adult patients with morbid obesity climbed from 3.1% in 2019 to 5.2% in 2024, a relative increase of 70.9%.

The impact of obesity on health is varied and vast. The World Health Organization notes that being overweight or obese increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders like osteoarthritis, and certain cancers.

Historic Struggles with Weight ... and UPFs

For decades, weight management has been a frustrating cycle for consumers. From calorie counting and meal replacements to diet pills and “detox” cleanses, many programs promised quick fixes that rarely delivered sustainable results. “Yo-yo dieting,” where people repeatedly lose and

regain weight, became a familiar pattern that often worsened metabolic health.

Public health campaigns have consistently emphasized healthier eating and physical activity. While lifestyle changes remain essential, the stubborn rise of obesity rates has made clear that broad-based recommendations alone aren’t enough. For many individuals, metabolic, hormonal, and behavioral drivers of appetite and weight gain prove difficult to overcome.

Meanwhile, ultra-processed foods (UPFs) have become a dominant feature of modern diets, and their impact on health, weight, and metabolism has been increasingly scrutinized by researchers. These foods, which are often high in refined sugars, unhealthy fats, salt, and additives, are engineered for convenience, shelf stability, and sensory appeal, but they typically lack fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals.

In a recent analysis of dietary data, the CDC concluded that more than half of the calories Americans consume come from UPFs. These findings, the first of their kind published by the federal agency, corroborate years of research.

The report also comes as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and Department of Agriculture (USDA) are working to create a standard definition for UPFs in order to more effectively assess their role in chronic disease.

“Ultra-processed food consumption has been associated with higher risk of cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality,” the report stated. “Most dietary guidelines, including the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025, recommend eating a variety of whole foods and limiting intake of foods with added sugars.”

GLP-1 dieters are likely to lose muscle mass

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The nutritional composition of UPFs can disrupt normal satiety signals, leading to overconsumption of calories. Unlike whole foods, which require more effort to digest and absorb, ultra-processed foods are energy-dense and quickly metabolized, promoting rapid spikes in blood sugar and insulin. Over time, these repeated spikes can contribute to insulin resistance, a key factor in metabolic disorders and weight gain.

Studies have shown associations between high intake of UPFs and increased risk of obesity. One reason is that these foods are often formulated to be hyper-palatable, combining sugar, fat, and salt in ways that override natural appetite regulation. The reward centers of the brain respond strongly to these combinations, which can drive cravings and make it difficult for individuals to moderate portions.

Emerging research suggests that diets

high in UPFs are linked not only to weight gain but the accumulation of fat around the abdomen, which is particularly associated with metabolic complications such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Beyond caloric density and palatability, UPFs can affect gut health and metabolism in subtle but significant ways. Many contain emulsifiers, preservatives, and other additives that can alter the gut microbiome, potentially promoting inflammation and impairing nutrient absorption.

A disrupted gut microbiota has been implicated in both obesity and metabolic syndrome, highlighting a pathway by which UPFs might contribute to metabolic dysregulation beyond just excess calories. Moreover, these foods are often low in dietary fiber, which normally slows glucose absorption, promotes satiety, and supports healthy gut bacteria. The lack of fiber and other bioactive compounds can exac-

erbate metabolic stress and make weight management more challenging.

GLP-1 Surges onto the Scene

The emergence of glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists has sparked a seismic shift in both medical intervention and consumer perception of what is possible when it comes to weight and health.

GLP-1 receptor agonists are analogs of a naturally occurring hormone that stimulates insulin secretion (lowering blood sugar), inhibits glucagon (raising blood sugar), slows gastric emptying, and reduces appetite. Natural GLP-1 is rapidly degraded in the body, but these new drugs extend its action, creating a potent and durable effect on satiety and blood glucose control.

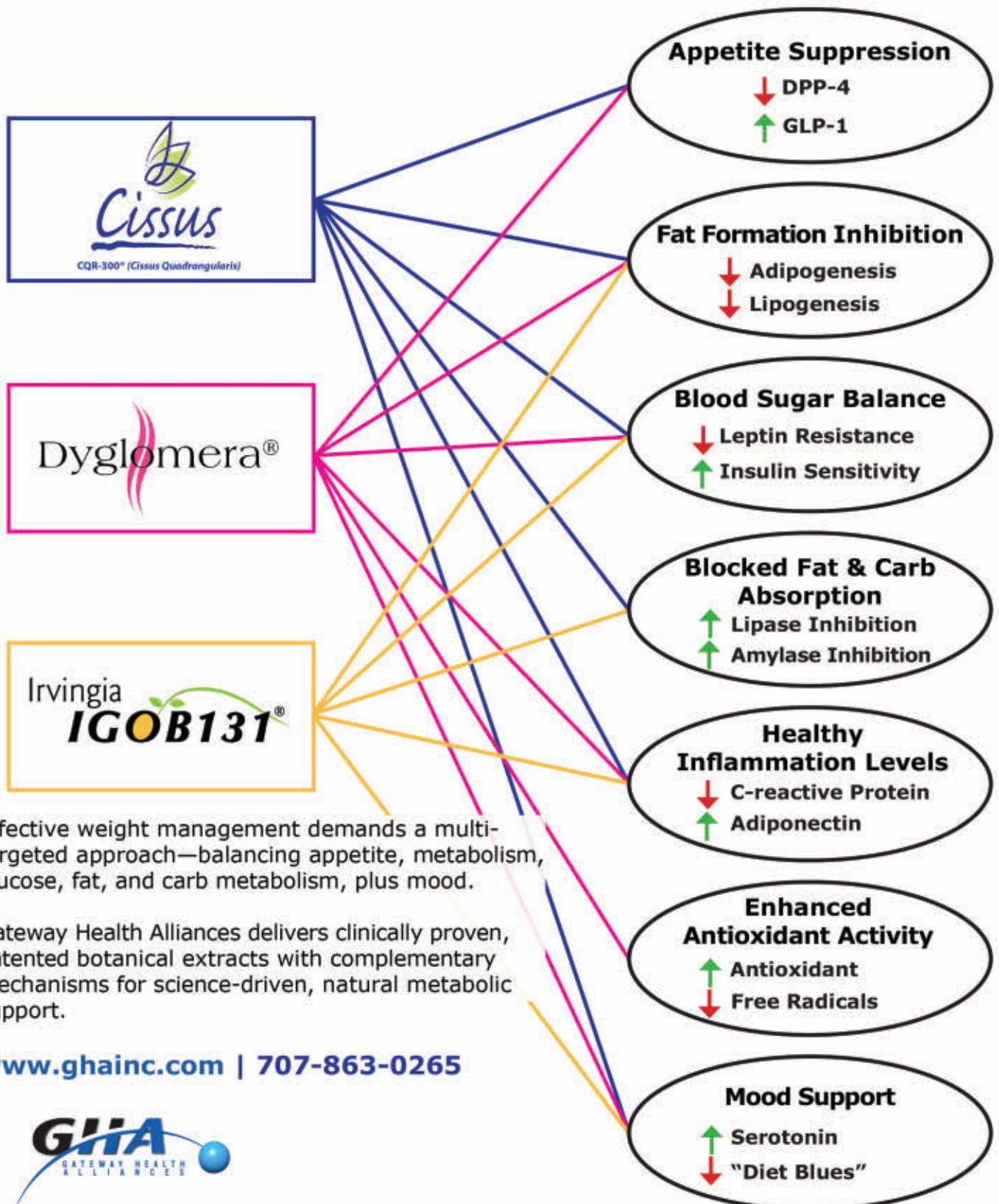
The percentage of adult patients prescribed any type of GLP-1 drug rose from



Studies show many people regain weight within a year of stopping use of GLP-1 drugs.

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“Regulatory scrutiny will tighten, which is a good thing; it rewards the companies that put real science behind their claims.”

—Shil Kothari, Gateway Health Alliances

0.9% in 2019 to 4.0% in 2024, a relative increase of 363.7%, according to FAIR Health.

Media coverage has fueled interest. Stories of rapid weight loss from high-profile figures using semaglutide (Ozempic, Wegovy) and tirzepatide (Mounjaro, Zepbound) have dominated headlines. For some, GLP-1 medications have been life-changing, improving metabolic health while dramatically reducing body weight.

This is still just the beginning of the GLP-1 era. In August, Eli Lilly announced positive Phase 3 results for its investigational once-daily oral GLP-1 pill, orforglipron, showing efficacy and a safety profile consistent with injectables at 72 weeks. Lilly expects to submit to regulators by year-end.

“Obesity is one of the most pressing global health challenges of our time, driving global chronic disease burden and impacting more than one billion people worldwide,” said Kenneth Custer, PhD, executive vice president and president of Lilly Cardiometabolic Health in a statement announcing study results. “With orforglipron, we’re working to transform obesity care by introducing a potential once-daily oral therapy that could support early intervention and long-term disease management, while offering a convenient alternative to injectable treatments.”

Despite their efficacy, GLP-1 therapies have limitations. They are costly, require prescriptions, and often must be taken indefinitely to maintain benefits. Gastrointestinal side effects including nausea and constipation are common. Importantly, studies show weight regain typically occurs once treatment stops. A study published in 2022 in *Diabetes, Obesity and Metabolism* found that one year after withdrawal of semaglutide use, partici-

pants regained two-thirds of their prior weight loss, with similar changes in cardiometabolic variables.

The current GLP-1 dynamic sets the stage for complementary solutions. Dietary supplements, functional foods, and lifestyle strategies can help consumers optimize benefits, reduce side effects, and sustain results long term.

Muscle Health

As GLP-1 drugs reshape obesity care, a critical concern has emerged alongside fat reduction: preserving lean mass. While effective in driving weight loss, these interventions can also lead to muscle loss, which carries serious implications for metabolism, strength, and long-term health.

Skeletal muscle is metabolically active, influencing energy expenditure, glucose regulation, mobility, and resilience against aging. Loss of lean tissue slows resting metabolic rate, increases fatigue, raises risk of weight regain, and contributes to frailty and sarcopenia.

Early data suggest a portion, perhaps 20-30%, of weight lost with GLP-1 therapy is lean mass. Without nutrition and exercise interventions, patients may trade excess fat for diminished physical function.

“Maintaining muscle is essential not only for metabolic health but also for independence, mobility, and quality of life,” said Stuart Gray, PhD, professor at the University of Glasgow. “This is particularly important in the context of rapid weight loss, where muscle is at risk.”

Resistance training remains the gold standard for preserving lean mass. Even modest weight-bearing activity stimulates muscle protein synthesis, especially

when combined with adequate dietary protein. Distributing protein intake evenly across meals appears more effective than consuming the bulk in one sitting. Sleep quality, stress management, and overall nutrient status also influence muscle retention. Noteworthy dietary solutions include:

- **Protein and amino acids:** Whey protein is the most researched, rich in essential amino acids and rapidly absorbed. Plant-based proteins, including pea, soy, and rice, are effective when consumed in sufficient amounts and blended to provide a complete amino acid profile. Leucine plays a central role in stimulating mTOR, the key pathway for muscle protein synthesis.

- **Creatine:** Extensively studied in sports nutrition, creatine supplementation enhances strength and reduces lean mass loss during calorie restriction. By replenishing ATP, it supports energy production in muscle cells.

- **HMB(β -Hydroxy β -Methylbutyrate):** A leucine metabolite shown to reduce protein breakdown and promote recovery, HMB is particularly helpful under catabolic stress such as dieting or illness.

- **Collagen peptides:** Collagen supports connective tissue and joint health, which are critical for individuals engaging in more exercise during weight loss.

- **Botanicals and adaptogens:** Ashwagandha has demonstrated effects on strength and endurance. Ursolic acid, found in apple peels and herbs, may help counter muscle atrophy. Anti-inflammatory botanicals (curcumin, boswellia) may aid recovery and reduce muscle degradation linked to systemic inflammation.

- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** EPA and DHA support muscle protein synthesis, reduce

inflammation, and may enhance resistance training outcomes.

A University of Glasgow study recently published in *Obesity* found krill oil supplementation helped preserve muscle strength and mass during weight loss. Participants on alternate-day fasting who supplemented with krill oil lost less muscle and handgrip strength, rose from a chair more quickly, and improved blood pressure compared to placebo.

“In this study we have found that krill oil can help to preserve our muscle mass and strength as we lose weight,” said Gray, a study co-author. “As maintenance of muscle is very important for our overall health and quality of life, these are extremely exciting findings.”

Functional Foods and Nutritional Needs

Companies are developing products to address muscle concerns directly. Danone North America recently launched Oikos Fusion, a cultured dairy drink with 23 grams of protein, 5 grams of prebiotic fiber, vitamins A, D, B3, B12, and calcium.

According to Danone, 27% of people in the U.S. are trying to lose weight, and nearly 10% of the U.S. population is on a GLP-1 receptor agonist. This creates unique nutrition challenges, including meeting daily protein needs to help prevent muscle loss.

Approximately 20% of weight lost on GLP-1 drugs is muscle, the company noted. Oikos Fusion is designed to help fill that gap.

“Pairing Danone’s decades of science expertise with the Oikos brand’s emphasis on strength and high-quality protein enabled us to create something truly unique for people looking to maintain muscle mass while on a weight loss journey,” said Rafael Acevedo, president of yogurt at Danone North America. “The growing need for tailored nutrition solutions for people experiencing muscle mass loss is something we can expertly tackle. We know change takes strength and we believe weight loss isn’t

only about taking things away, it’s about adding and strengthening routines with nutrient-dense products that help people better meet their goals.”

People on a weight loss journey often eat less, so it’s crucial to focus on the nutrient density of the foods they do eat, said Whitney Evans, PhD, director of nutrition and scientific affairs at Danone North America.

“When protein needs are not met, the body will start breaking down muscle to get the amino acids it needs. Fiber is also important considering its role in digestive health and because most Americans fall short on fiber intake. That’s why we created Oikos Fusion; in listening to GLP-1 users and studying the latest research, we packed as much targeted nutrition as possible into a small, delicious, and convenient bottle to help make it easier to meet key nutrition needs.”

GLP-1 users often experience reduced appetite, which can make it difficult to meet basic nutrient needs. This raises the risk of deficiencies in protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Supplements and fortified foods can help close

these gaps.

- **Fiber and probiotics** support satiety, digestion, and gut health. They may also mitigate common side effects of GLP-1 drugs, such as constipation.

- **Probiotics and the gut-brain axis:** Emerging evidence suggests certain probiotics may influence appetite signaling, stress response, and weight regulation.

- **Polyphenols:** Green tea catechins, citrus flavonoids, and grape-derived compounds show potential for supporting energy metabolism and satiety.

- **Micronutrients:** Vitamin D, calcium, and magnesium support bone and muscle health while B vitamins aid energy metabolism.

Managing Expectations

Shil Kothari, president of Gateway Health Alliances, said GLP-1 drugs are setting a new consumer expectation for rapid, measurable results. However, he noted, these drugs are costly, require prescriptions, and carry side effects.

“That’s why there’s growing demand for safe, clinically validated natural options that can be taken long term,” he said.



Oikos Fusion contains 23 grams of protein, 5 grams of prebiotic fiber, and vitamins A, D, B3, B12, and calcium.

Kothari noted opportunities to support consumers after they stop GLP-1 treatment, since studies show many regain weight within a year. Gateway's Dyglom-era and CQR-300 ingredients, which inhibit the enzyme DPP-4 to prolong GLP-1 activity, are positioned as natural solutions to extend metabolic benefits.

Other trends "reshaping" the category, according to Kothari, include multi-benefit formulations that address stress and sleep, new delivery formats like stick packs and gummies, and plant-based, clean-label extracts.

"We're going to see sustained, strong growth in both weight management and metabolic health," he predicted. "Regulatory scrutiny will tighten, which is a good thing; it rewards the companies that put real science behind their claims."

Guardrails for Making Prebiotic Claims

The Global Prebiotics Association (GPA) recently issued best practices for GLP-1-related claims, urging companies to emphasize transparency, human clinical substantiation, and complementary positioning rather than replacement of prescription drugs.

GPA guidance suggested highlighting digestive comfort, satiety support, and healthy weight maintenance while avoiding overstated GLP-1 claims that may draw regulatory scrutiny. For example, GPA recommended emphasizing the role of prebiotics in supporting gastrointestinal comfort during GLP-1 use, and positioning them for digestion and weight maintenance after discontinuation.

Looking Ahead

The GLP-1 era is reshaping not only medical practice but the dietary supplement and functional food markets as well. Consumers are increasingly aware of appetite regulation, metabolic health, and muscle preservation. Brands that deliver clinically validated, nutrient-dense, multi-benefit solutions while staying transparent and compliant will be best positioned to thrive.

Weight management isn't just about numbers on the scale or waistline measurements anymore. Today, it's about balancing benefits: losing fat while preserving muscle and strength, and helping consumers not only lose weight but achieve sustained health and metabolic resilience. **NW**



More consumers are understanding the importance of muscle health and maintaining lean mass while on a weight loss regimen.

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