

News Brief



FDA Approves New Weight Loss Drug Zepbound

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved Zepbound, further expanding the market of government-approved weight loss medication. The new injectable drug, which is made by Eli Lilly and Company, is intended for use by adults with obesity or those suffering from weight-related conditions (e.g., high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol), provided they also reduce their calorie diet and increase physical activity. Zepbound is expected to be available by the end of the year.

“In light of increasing rates of both obesity and overweight in the United States, today’s approval addressed an unmet medical need.”

- John Sharretts, director of the FDA’s Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, Division of Diabetes, Lipid Disorders and Obesity

Zepbound activates receptors of hormones secreted from the intestine (glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) and glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide) to reduce appetite and food intake. It is administered by injection under the skin once weekly, and the dosage must be increased over four to 20 weeks to achieve the target dosage of 5 milligrams (mg), 10 mg or 15 mg once weekly. The maximum dosage of Zepbound is 15 mg once weekly.

The active ingredient in Zepbound for weight loss is tirzepatide, which is already approved under the trade name Mounjaro to be used along with diet and

exercise to help improve blood sugar (glucose) in adults with Type 2 diabetes mellitus.

Commercially insured individuals with coverage for the new drug may be eligible to pay \$25 for a one-month or three-month prescription, according to Eli Lilly and Company. Individuals who are commercially insured without coverage for Zepbound may be eligible to pay a minimum of \$550 for a one-month prescription, which the drugmaker claims is about 50% lower than the list price of \$1,059. This is about 20% less than the list price of rival drug Wegovy, according to BioPharmaDive.com.

Employer Takeaway

Obesity is a chronic disease that impacts many individuals and can result in serious health complications, including heart disease, stroke or diabetes. According to the FDA, nearly 70% of American adults are obese or overweight. The recent string of weight loss drugs offers hope to many individuals who struggle with obesity and are seeking better options for weight management.

As the popularity of weight loss drugs continues to rise in the United States, more employees are asking their employers about these medications. Consequently, employers are faced with the difficult decision of whether to cover these expensive medications. While it’s still uncertain whether GLP-1 drugs are effective in treating obesity, employers should continue to monitor these developments closely and find ways to improve employee wellness.

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