GLOBAL DAIRY PLATFORM

Perspective Paper

Dairy in the Age of GLP-1 Medications

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KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Global rates of obesity, a complex chronic disease, have reached epidemic proportions.
- The use of GLP-1 medications in the treatment of obesity and related disorders leaves consumers eating less and at increased risk for nutrient deficiencies.
- Dairy foods are nutrient-rich, providing high-quality protein and other essential nutrients, making them an important component of healthy diets, particularly for those taking GLP-1 medications.

Obesity, a chronic and complex disease defined by excess body fat, which affects 1 in 8 people worldwide, has nearly doubled since 1990.[1] The statistic is alarming given obesity is associated with increased risk for noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease and diabetes as well as adverse psychosocial consequences such as depression, anxiety, and poor performance at work or school that can be compounded by stigma and anti-fat bias.

A relatively new class of weight-loss medications known as GLP-1 receptor agonists reduce obesity by mimicking a natural hormone produced by the body, glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1). These medications work by slowing the release of food from the stomach, interacting directly with the brain to make people feel fuller longer, and improving levels of insulin and glucagon in the bloodstream, hormones that help regulate blood sugar levels and the body's ability to utilize food for energy. GLP-1 medications are prescribed to treat type 2 diabetes and obesity, but emerging evidence indicates there could be a broader range of therapeutic applications, resulting in a transformative effect on overall health.

The use of GLP-1 medications has changed the dynamics of social eating occasions and the way people consume food, making them more mindful of their food choices and opting for more nutrient-rich options. According to a recent market research study conducted by Mattson[2] in about 100 individuals, 92% of participants taking GLP-1 medication reported eating less, with 61% eating fewer meals and 51% eating fewer snacks. Participants reported consuming smaller portion sizes and more high-protein foods, but also reported consuming fewer dairy foods. With regard to drinks, 66% of participants reported drinking less soda and alcohol and 59% reported drinking more tap or still water and 38% reported drinking more protein beverages. This GDP Perspective Paper explores the role of dairy in the age of GLP-1 medications.

Obesity and malnutrition: A global landscape

Obesity and malnutrition are two interconnected global health crises that affect millions of people worldwide.[3] The prevalence of obesity varies significantly by region; for instance, North America exhibits some of the highest obesity rates, with more than 36% of adults classified as obese. In Europe, rates are also concerning, averaging around 25% in many countries. Regions such as the Middle East and parts of Latin America are also experiencing rapid increases in obesity rates. Even in Asia and Africa, where obesity is lower on average, rates are climbing, particularly in urban populations.[1]

Despite living in an age of unprecedented food availability and technological advancements in agricultural production, the world is simultaneously grappling with malnutrition, which encompasses both undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies as well as obesity. Hidden hunger, which refers to a form of malnutrition that occurs when individuals do not receive sufficient amounts of essential vitamins and minerals necessary for optimal health, despite consuming enough calories, often goes unnoticed. For example, it's been estimated that one-half of women in the United Kingdom and one-third of women in the United States are living with at least one micronutrient deficiency.[4] In essence, many of the world's people are overfed but undernourished.

Use of GLP-1 medications is on the rise around the world

Success in the treatment of diabetes and obesity has driven demand for GLP-1 medications globally. In the United States, it is estimated that nearly five million adults (~2% of all adults) are currently using GLP-1 medication and that number is expected to climb to approximately 15 million (~6% of all adults) by 2030. GLP-1 medications are one of the most prescribed treatments for obesity in the country, with the total number of US providers who wrote GLP-1 prescriptions increasing by 228% between July 2020 and May 2023.[5]

Europe is also seeing growth in the GLP-1 market, with a compound annual growth rate of 22.4% expected between 2024 and 2030.[6] In Asia Pacific and Latin American regions, the use of GLP-1 medications is also on the rise, although it may not be as widespread as in North America and Europe - current market growth rates are estimated between 5% and 6% over the next 5 years.[7,8]

Use of GLP-1 medications may exacerbate hidden hunger

The use of GLP-1 medications, while effective for weight loss and managing obesity-related conditions, could inadvertently exacerbate hidden hunger in certain populations. These medications work, in part, by suppressing appetite, which can lead to reduced food intake and, in some cases, a focus on caloric consumption at the expense of nutritional quality, although more research in this area is needed.[9] As individuals on these medications may consume fewer calories, there is a risk that their diets could become less diverse and less nutrient-dense, resulting in a lack of essential vitamins and minerals.

Additionally, for some individuals, the high cost of these medications could strain their budgets, leading to further reductions in food quality or variety as they seek to conserve resources.[10] As a result, it is crucial for healthcare providers to incorporate comprehensive nutritional guidance alongside GLP-1 medication treatment to ensure that individuals maintain balanced diets rich in essential nutrients, thus mitigating the risk of hidden hunger while addressing weight management.

Dairy's role in nourishment and health

Dairy foods are nutrient-rich, providing high-quality protein and other nutrients necessary for adequate growth and survival for relatively few calories. For those individuals experiencing reduced appetite, consuming high-quality protein food sources, meaning those that contain all essential amino acids necessary for the proper function and maintenance of lean body mass, is of the utmost importance. Dairy foods are good sources of high-quality protein and the consumption of dairy foods, regardless of their fat content, is associated with nutritional adequacy, weight maintenance, beneficial effects on bone, lean body mass, and cardiometabolic health.[11] Further, dairy foods offer affordable nourishment and are important contributors to least-cost nutritionally adequate dietary patterns.[12] Therefore, dairy foods are great options for those in a scenario where food intake is reduced and every bite counts.

DAIRY LEADERSHIP: A CALL TO ACTION.

Help make every bite count. As the market for GLP-1 medications continues to expand, so too will the demand for nutrient-rich food options, particularly those containing high-quality protein in smaller portions that will offer the most amount of nourishment for the smallest number of servings. Let health professionals and consumers know that dairy is an excellent choice in this regard, offering a good amount of high-quality protein and nutrients for not too many calories per serving.

For more information on the Global Dairy Platform's Perspective Papers or our Quarterly Webinar Series, please reach out to Dr. Beth Bradley at beth.bradley@globaldairyplatform.com.

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