

Weight-Loss Drugs May Prevent 10 Types of Cancer

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People with type 2 diabetes who used glucagon-like peptide (GLP-1) receptor agonists—the drug class that includes Ozempic (semaglutide)—had a lower risk for multiple types of cancer, according to a recent study.

Overweight and obesity have been linked to at least 13 different cancers. GLP-1 analogs stimulate insulin production, regulate appetite and slow emptying of the stomach; they also have anti-inflammatory properties. Originally developed to treat diabetes, they have other benefits, including weight loss and reduced cardiovascular risk.

Researchers at Case Western Reserve University looked at electronic health records from over 60 health care organizations to compare the incidence of 13 obesity-associated malignancies among more than 1,650,000 people who were prescribed GLP-1 agonists or other diabetes medications between 2005 and 2018.

People who used GLP-1 agonists had a significantly lower risk for 10 of the 13 malignancies compared with insulin recipients. For example, gallbladder cancer was reduced by 65%, liver cancer by 53%, ovarian cancer by 48% and colorectal cancer by 46%.

The magnitude of risk reduction was similar to that observed for bariatric surgery or intensive lifestyle interventions involving diet and exercise. However, GLP-1 agonists did not significantly reduce the risk for any type of cancer when compared with metformin, which also has anti-inflammatory effects and has been linked to lower cancer risk.

The potential cancer-preventive effects of GLP-1 agonists “warrant further long-term studies,” and the drugs also should be evaluated for secondary prevention to delay cancer recurrence, the study authors suggested.

