

'GLP-1 friendly' labels target weight-loss drug users



Nutritional shakes with "GLP-1 Friendly" labels sit on the shelf of a Kroger grocery store Tuesday in Ann Arbor, Mich. DEE-ANN DURBIN — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Meals and snacks with "GLP-1 Friendly" labels on the packaging are becoming more common in U.S. supermarkets as a growing number of Americans try obesity drugs like Wegovy and Zepbound to lose weight.

But the labels aren't regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, unlike the popular medications themselves. Dieticians say people taking GLP-1 drugs need to read ingredient lists and talk to experts about what nutrients they need — and don't need.

"A drug does not educate you on how to eat properly," said Suzy Badaracco, a registered dietitian and president of the food trends forecasting firm Culinary Tides. "You're not magically going to be educated — without a doctor's help — to eat healthy."

The nutritional needs of GLP-1 users aren't that different from those of the general population, said Shannon Christen, a dietitian and diabetes educator with UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital.

The difference is that GLP-1 users eat less because the drugs suppress their appetites, so the foods they do eat need to be packed with nutrients, Christen said. They can expect to eat around 50% less than they ate before they started taking the medications.

she said.

"Every bite needs to be nutritious," Christen said.

Protein helps GLP-1 users maintain muscle mass as they lose weight. Christen said she generally recommends that patients eat 20-30 grams of protein per meal, or 1.2 grams per kilogram of body weight daily.

Samantha Snashall, a registered dietitian at Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center, said GLP-1 users should also try to meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recommended daily amount of fiber, which is around 14 grams for every 1,000 calories consumed. Fiber is important for everyone, but it's particularly helpful for GLP-1 patients because constipation is a frequent side effect of the medications, she said.

Badaracco said it's easy for GLP-1 users to get dehydrated since the drugs may block the body's thirst signals. Fresh fruits and vegetables provide hydration, she said, and patients should also drink water throughout the day.

GLP-1 users should avoid meals and snacks that are deep fried, high in sugar or saturated fat and spicy or acidic, since those foods can worsen side effects and work against weight-loss efforts, Snashall said.

Drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy mimic the naturally occurring hormone GLP-1, which the body produces in the small intestine to control blood sugar levels, digestion and appetite. Around 12% of U.S. adults were taking GLP-1 medications as of November to lose weight or treat a chronic condition like diabetes, according to a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Big food companies expect the demand for GLP-1 drugs only to grow as the injected medication becomes available in pill form, which happened with Wegovy last week. Meals marketed for GLP-1 users also are attracting non-users, including people who have come off the drugs but want to maintain weight loss.

Nestle targeted GLP-1 users when it launched its Vital Pursuit frozen meal brand in the fall of 2024. The company didn't use a "GLP-1 Friendly" label at first but added one to the packaging after customers reported that a label would help them identify products that met their dietary needs, according to Jennifer Barnes, vice president of brand marketing for Nestle's frozen meals.

Sales have been brisk and the company is adding new meals to the lineup, Barnes said. She said the products have broad appeal; 77% of Vital Pursuit sales are coming from households where no one is using GLP-1 drugs.

Conagra Brands added a "GLP-1 Friendly" label to 26 of its Healthy Choice frozen meals in early 2025. The Smoothie King chain has a "GLP-1 Support Menu," while several meal kit brands cater to patients, like Factor's "GLP-1 Balance."

Both Conagra and Nestle got approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service to use "GLP-1 Friendly" labels. The USDA said it granted approval because the labels are accompanied by statements about protein and fiber content and aren't misleading. But the USDA reiterated that there is no regulatory standard for the term "GLP-1 Friendly."

Other companies are targeting GLP-1 users but not mentioning the drugs on their labels or menus. In November, French yogurt maker Lactalis began selling Ratio Pro Fiber yogurt in the U.S. The company said the yogurt, which contains 20 grams of protein and 10 grams of fiber per serving, was formulated with GLP-1 users in mind. Restaurant chains Chipotle and Shake Shack also mentioned GLP-1 users last month when they debuted new protein-heavy menu items.

Packaged foods may benefit GLP-1 users who live alone or don't want to do a lot of cooking, Snashall said. But consumers should be wary of added ingredients like sugar or sodium.

"Labels can be very misleading, making a person think it's healthier than it is," Snashall said.

Vital Pursuit's Cauliflower Crust Three Meat Pizza has 400 calories and 32% of the recommended daily value of protein, for example, but it also contains 40% of the recommended sodium and saturated fat. Christen said she advises GLP-1 users to choose foods with less than 10 grams of fat per serving because fat can worsen symptoms like nausea and acid reflux. The Three Meat Pizza has 18 grams of fat.

Smoothie King's 20-ounce Gladiator GLP-1 Vanilla smoothie has more calories, sodium and cholesterol than an original glazed donut from Krispy Kreme.

Christen said that if foods are going to be labeled “GLP-1 Friendly,” she hopes they are truly nutrient dense and come in reasonable portions.

“Done responsibly, I think the labels could actually help people make smart choices while they’re on therapies, but done poorly, it could trivialize the medical treatment and drift into diet culture marketing,” Christen said.

Badaracco said she advises clients not to put “GLP-1 Friendly” on their packaging. The labels aren’t backed by standards and may confuse some customers by making them think that eating frozen and ready-made meals that mention the medications will give them the benefits of the drugs.

Badaracco said labels should instead focus on how products will benefit consumers.

“You want to talk to the consumer about what it is that they’re looking for. They’re looking for protein, they’re looking for fiber, a good source of hydration, great flavor, it keeps your energy up,” Badaracco said.

