GLP-1s Beyond Weight Loss

So the GLP-1s have this reducing inflammation effect on the body. It calms down inflammation. It acts as an appetite suppressant in the body, and that's where a lot of people are noticing a lot of this weight loss from.

It also has cardiometabolic impacts in addition to reducing inflammatory markers, we're seeing really great improvements in just overall cardiometabolic markers, insulin sensitivity, A1C numbers, all of that, helping people move away from that pre-diabetes stage, closer to health.

And then we're also noticing the gut microbiome impacts on this, as well as the brain and effects, right? The dopamine pleasure centers and things like that.

helping with addiction. That's so many things this is doing outside of weight loss. It's just, there's a reason our bodies make it is because it does all these beautiful things.

And it's so fantastic to see the scientific community really embracing all of the other areas that this can help with. Your health is shaped by more than symptoms.

Through real stories and expert insights, we explore how your genetics, environment, and daily choices affect your wellbeing. We uncover root causes and share practical tools to help you find the healing you need.

Welcome to the Forum Health Integrative Medicine Podcast. As I was doing research when GLP-1s first hit the market and we were exploring weight loss and these new peptides for the Forum Health Clinic, I was doing some research side by side with our providers and I was shocked at what I discovered.

It really went from weight loss to whole body healing. And this episode is all about why GLP-1s make sense for chronic disease. When you think about it, it makes perfect sense that GLP-1s go far beyond diabetes or weight loss because their core function, these medications, calm inflammation.

And inflammation is the spark behind nearly every chronic disease. In our patients, we're seeing firsthand when we start someone on a GLP-1 protocol and we follow up with their lab work, we're often seeing lower CRP, reduced triglycerides, improved A1C, and even better insulin sensitivity.

So these aren't just metabolic wins, these are inflammatory wins. And when inflammation comes down, the entire body begins to shift out of that disease acceleration mode.

And that's why we're seeing GLP-1s help with conditions that aren't even primarily metabolic, things like PCOS, autoimmune flares, gut dysfunction, and even cognitive decline.

If you look at something like the Bredesen protocol for Alzheimer's prevention and reversal, it's built around stabilizing blood sugar, calming inflammation, and optimizing insulin signaling.

Those are the exact pathways GLP-1s support.

How GLP-1s Were Discovered

So when researchers first discovered their neuroprotective effects decades ago, it wasn't random. It was rooted in the same principle, reduce inflammation and protect the brain.

PCOS is another great example. It's classically considered a hormonal condition, but at the root there's insulin resistance and chronic inflammation driving that entire picture.

Irregular cycles, androgen excess, cystic ovaries, So if we can use GLP-1s to improve insulin sensitivity and lower inflammatory cytokines, we're not just managing symptoms, we're reversing these underlying drivers.

So when we zoom out, the beauty of GLP-1s is that they fit perfectly into what functional medicine has always taught, that inflammation is the root cause of disease.

In our clinics, we're seeing inflammation markers drop, and that's meaningful because when you calm inflammation, you can improve everything from PCOS and insulin resistance to brain fog and even neurodegenerative conditions.

It's the same principle behind protocols like Dr. Bredesen's work on Alzheimer's, fix blood sugar, reduce inflammation, and you can change the trajectory of disease.

GLP-1s just happen to be the modern tool that's giving us a biochemical way to do it, which is so cool. So today, we're going to really just focus in on how GLP-1 medications have evolved beyond their use for weight loss and what that means for patients struggling with inflammation, brain fog, and cravings.

Today, we have our guest, Erica Shepherd, our nurse practitioner, who is a board certified family nurse practitioner with Forum Health, who specializes in integrative approaches to hormonal, metabolic, and mental health.

She combines advanced science and compassionate care to help patients overcome fatigue, inflammation, burnout, and brain fog at the root cause, guiding them toward sustainable wellness.

Welcome to the Forum Health podcast. We're here to bring you real conversations about functional medicine, science, and healing. All right, let's get started.

Hi, Erica. Thank you so much for joining me today. My pleasure, Amanda. Thank you for having me. Absolutely. So today we're diving into one of the most talked about topics I think in healthcare right now is GLP-1s.

And most people know them as the weight loss medications, the shot that takes your appetite away and you lose weight, right? But there's so much more to that story.

Microdosing for Brain Fog and Inflammation

And I know that when we were researching, if we were going to bring this into our network, if this was something that we were going to offer, when we really looked at the mechanisms of action and what was really happening in the body, the research in brain inflammation and dementia, it was so empowering.

Um, so today we're going to, we're going to talk more about why we chose GLP ones as part of our protocols beyond weight loss. All right. So Erica, can you tell us a little bit about how GLP ones were first discovered and how research evolved from diabetes to brain health?

Yeah, totally. So. You know, GLP-1s, as you know, are being touted in the diabetic world. It's like, okay, you can have the shot once a week. It's to help keep your diabetes at bay, and even in some cases, reversing it and reversing people out of diabetes and pre-diabetes.

But, you know, as the research is real hot right now, the GLP-1s are like the most popular girl at school at the moment. And where this has gone to is that they're finding in the animal studies and human studies is that there were so many benefits beyond just metabolic health and regulating insulin and blood sugar levels.

So with the brain health, they're finding that the GLP-1s are working as a potent anti-inflammatory, like you said, and with that, It does go into the blood-brain barrier and provides that neuroprotective effect by reversing oxidative stress and neural inflammation.

So when it comes to Alzheimer's and neurodegenerative conditions, there could be a great potential for the GLP-1s

being protective of those processes going forward and maybe even finding a way to biohack and help reverse in some cases.

Absolutely. And I'm just so, when we started looking at this before, one of the things that I thought was just so interesting, just an interesting tidbit is that when GLP-1s, they've been around for decades.

We know that. Like Ozempic is new, but like GLP ones are not new. Yeah, it's not this isn't new science. And I don't know what came first the chicken or the egg, right?

But I remember when I was doing my initial research on GLP ones when they were first coming to market, that they were actually discovered Or at least it's been known for quite some time that GLP-1s were first used in patients who have cognitive decline and dementia and Alzheimer's.

And it really worked for reducing neural inflammation, slowing down the progress of that disease in patients. And the reason it got kind of switched over to more of the cardiometabolic area was because of the side effect of the appetite suppressant.

And so it was actually first modeled or looked at for dementia, Alzheimer's, neuroprotective inflammatory conditions, but that population of patients were already susceptible to poor appetite.

that the research made a flip and now we're just circling back to it now decades later. I don't know if we're, the whole country is circling back to it.

I think that this information and providers like the ones at Forum Health or, you know, who have studied peptides a little bit more extensively have kind of known this for a while, but it's so great that this science is now reaching the masses.

100%. I mean, you know, the other name for dementia Alzheimer's is type three diabetes. Yep. And so, and that gut-brain connection and that inflammation, it's connected.

And so the fact, yes, bringing up that history point of what it was initially used for, and then finding, okay, well, we're actually going to use this for the diabetes instead.

It makes total sense, but going back to its original use, I think we have a huge opportunity for improvement there. And I have to say here at Forum Health Denver, I have had a handful of patients who had been on it initially for weight loss come back and they've maintained their weight, but they loved their mental clarity on it.

And they asked to restart on a low dose for the sole purpose of the mental clarity, reducing brain fog. And it's simply for that use and using it in my doses to help them attain that.

Yeah, obviously patients can come to and go to clinics for the use of this for weight loss, but we've actually seen a lot of our providers incorporate microdosing of the semiglutide or terzapetide into patient protocols for a whole bunch of different things.

Like you said, brain fog, clarity, that's been one of the reasons for microdosing. low, like just managing low grade inflammation, not the purpose of stimulating that appetite suppressant kickback.

But in addition to that autoimmune PCOS, we're seeing those, they'll get integrated into those protocols now because they have that inflammatory balance.

But in addition, the other really cool thing is gut health. We've been seeing people for both the gut brain connection and we're seeing a lot more research in the science of how the semiglutide or the GLPs are influencing the gut microbiome in a really good way.

So we've been seeing it more for gut related issues and then in the microdosing area and then also addiction and

behavior changes I think has been another because you're really affecting to those pleasure centers of the brain.

100%. You know, what's been really cool about being here at the Denver office is that the patients who come here, Colorado, they got it on lockdown. They really do care about our health.

And so the patients who typically come here have already done a lot of work on themselves. They are very knowledgeable and they just want to optimize at this point.

And I do a lot, as I said, as you said, a lot of that health and a lot of mental health and well-being.

Managing Side Effects and Detox Support

And so when patients are like, okay, I'm already eating right, I'm exercising, they're doing all the right things, where can we, you know, optimize? The GLP ones have actually been utilized a ton here at the clinic for areas other than weight loss and very effectively.

So I, you know, but the little explanation about the brain health, just so you all are in the know, You know, when you eat, your gut really releases the GOP-1.

It's like a messenger that talks to your brain saying, hey, we've got enough nutrients, slow down. So that's why the GOP-1 drugs mimic and amplify that signal of like, you've had enough, right?

There's enough. So then already natural things in the body. So when we are natural things in the body. Yeah. Peptide natural, our body already produces it.

When we supplement with a shot of the GLP-1, we're giving our bodies more of what it's already producing. Exactly, what it already produces. So sometimes just like hormones can be out of balance and our nutrients can be out of balance, our peptides and amino acids can be out of balance, right?

So that's why GLP-1s, again, it's what your body produces just like some people are at hormone therapy. Yeah, your body produces it, but it's not optimal.

But the brain connection where it acts in the brain's reward centers like Amanda's saying, it's like the same areas that fire when we see a dessert or alcohol or other rewarding stimuli.

So there's all of a sudden people are recognizing, hey, I'm drinking less. If I have cravings for alcohol, I'm not actually having as many cravings for alcohol.

Some people are having less cravings if they have an issue with vaping or drugs that they're recognizing, hey, that's actually not as strong as it was.

It's because the GOP-1 quiets that dopamine response. So temptation, things that have typically built that dopamine reward aren't as tempting as they used to be.

And I'm really excited to you know, utilize that more with people who are looking to get past cravings beyond appetite. Absolutely. Just see if they can find more balance in their bodies in that way as well.

At Forum Health, we uncover the why behind your symptoms. With advanced lab testing, hormone optimization, and cutting-edge therapies, we help you heal and perform your best.

And now, through shopforumhealth.com, you can access physician-grade supplements trusted by our providers, supporting everything from adrenal health to focus and longevity.

Learn more at ForumHealth.com and explore supplements at ShopForumHealth.com. So the GLP-1s have this reducing inflammation effect on the body. It calms down inflammation.

It acts as an appetite suppressant in the body, and that's where a lot of people are noticing a lot of this weight loss from. It also has cardiometabolic impacts in addition to reducing inflammatory markers.

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That's so many things that this is doing outside of weight loss. There's a reason our bodies make it is because it does all these beautiful things and it's so fantastic to see the scientific community really embracing all of the other areas that this can help with.

We're really talking about not really the weight loss side of this, which is a little bit of the higher dosing. Let's talk a little bit about microdosing.

What does microdosing mean in this context and why are some patients seeing benefits with these smaller doses? Yeah, definitely. So microdosing is that we are giving doses that are below what's FDA recommended for their initial intent.

So we're giving these smaller doses still on a weekly basis that are to also help stimulate the body's own natural healing responses when given, again, has GLP-1.

And then that way, a lot of these patients are experiencing these other effects of the GLP-1 without so much the appetite suppressing effect because those higher doses do create an appetite suppression.

And so the microdose provides the benefit because a lot of my patients are at normal or goal weight. And they're not looking to lose a bunch of weight, but they are looking for the benefits, for the various benefits.

And so that microdosing can help provide those benefits without the appetite suppression so much. And even, you know, those lower doses, some people are really still feeling somewhat of an appetite.

Oh, yeah, I think that. I think that a lot of our providers too, like we approached and do approach weight loss a little bit differently. Of course, there's the FDA recommended dosing.

We tend to be a little bit more conservative or at least some providers in our network that will partner with our patients about maybe when we want to start lower and slower because we can always go up the next week.

That's the beauty of a once a week injection if dose number one isn't like strong enough, then next week we can always go up. But when you get a dose, that's a little bit too much for you.

Like anybody who's had a little bit too much of the semah can, I'm sure in the past, right? You've either got nausea, you got the headaches, the, oh, the oofs.

Microdosing for Chronic Disease Support

The oofs. The oofs. A hundred percent. And for the audience real quick, the oofs, because a lot of people don't know this part, so I just want to get into is that when you're starting to go into that appetite suppression, and then you are releasing It's a Herxhunders reaction.

It will be a Herxhunders reaction. And that's the reason when we do a lot of our weight loss, we encourage patients to do a detox to prep the body first is because exactly when you reduce your appetite, you start limiting how much goes in.

Right. And so your body has more capacity to release toxins that are in storage that are stored in your fat cells so

that you can clear the body. And what happens with That is a Hirschheimer's reaction.

Your liver is still backed up. And so you get this release of toxins from fat to blood cells. And they travel to the liver and they're like, Oh, I'm in line.

I'm just going to dance in the blood for a little bit longer. And you feel like poo because you've got extra toxins raging in your bloodstream. and your liver isn't clearing them effectively enough, and so you feel like garbage.

So, and that's a big reason people will, our providers will recommend binders and things like that for it as well. Typically, so we start a little bit lower on our weight loss side, but when we're talking about microdosing, we're probably starting even lower than that.

And it's really just to give the body just that little bit of, in the amount of peptides. A little bit of boost, a little boost and to get those anti-inflammatory effects, to get that reduction of brain fog.

So when it comes to like the brain fog reduction, do you think that's more because of the inflammation being reduced in the body? Is that the primary mechanism why we're seeing like the brain fog reduction?

From what I'm understanding from what Researcher is out there, yes, it's the neural inflammation. Listen, we live in 2025. no matter how clean you eat, no matter what you're doing, our world's a little dirty and a little stressful.

So both the external stressors and the psychological stressors are going to cause neuroinflammation. That's just the bottom line. We are more stressed, overworked, and overburdened by toxins than we've ever been in the entire human history.

The increase in mental health that is just exploded, you know, we have more solutions and medications and things and ever yet our outcomes are worse. I truly believe it's because we are not addressing the roots, which are the things that are driving neural inflammation.

So all that to be said is that in addition to the brain fog and the clarity and it feels like people are losing the cobwebs from just getting some of that neural inflammation down.

We're also seeing a decrease on these microdoses of anxiety, depression, and that's interesting too because I've seen some conflicting info out there and I have some opinions, but I also haven't dug into the research.

But I've been seeing some talk out there that the GLP ones are actually increasing depression. And I don't know if I fully agree with that or I think it's a one-sided view in my opinion, but what do you have you seen that literature out there?

I have and what I have seen is from the higher doses and I have theories on why that higher dosing would possibly contribute to that. Well, I can speak from experience for myself.

And again, I'm not in any of these studies or anything like that. But like when I speak from your experience girl, it matters. Yeah. I mean, I've struggled with weight gain my entire life.

I've got I've have it pretty much under control these days. Thank you. But I went on the GLPs to lose a few and I found myself more depressed because I didn't have the food to distract me.

Like food was something I'm still always actively working on a relationship with. And when you go on a GLP one and you're not working alongside somebody to address your relationship with food, that can be a very eye opening and depressing experience because you literally can't reach for your best friend in the cupboard over there.

Like that cookie is wanting you, but you don't want it. And now you're left. Well, what do I want? And there's this absence in the mind because you took something away without the support to figure out what we need to replace that.

That is such an important point because it can turn, like you said, it's almost like a force sobriety from something that has been, like you said, a crutch in a relationship for a very long time.

And that component, that mind-body component is not being addressed enough. I think that is part of it. The other part is what I think can be the detox response.

Whoa, yeah. happen with that and letting yourself with so many toxins if you're not addressing the gut while you're doing these protocols. And that feels terrible.

I know like right now I'm going through a mold and SIBO detox. And I have been so emotional the last like month because of, and I understand what's happening.

It's releasing these toxins. I'm doing things properly, but also it's offloading that and there can be energetic components. We don't talk about that enough to that release.

of those toxins as well and so if you were like I was on a higher dose of a glp and I was detoxing I was so emotional you're not crazy you're not alone and I don't think it is like they don't we aren't removing a lot of times the lifestyle and like diet and stuff like there weren't changes made or There are, we guide people on the changes at forum, but in some of those early studies, it's here's a shot.

It's going to do the work for you. And they're still eating out and like eating the bad stuff too. So as they're releasing toxins, there's still a larger burden.

Like there's still that burden of toxins coming in that a lot of people hadn't hadn't wrangled in yet when I think some of that information was being shared.

So, so glad you brought that up because it's so important. And again, what we do know from the studies that have been coming out is that they do have a positive modulation of both the dopamine and serotonin pathways.

And I think that's just a little more obvious in the microdosing crew because again you're not necessarily dealing with the food component so much. You know in our in our clinics too we're not saying that as much because we are supporting the liver and we're doing we're taking through that comprehensive approach of slow and slow first, like you don't want to have that reaction in the body.

It's traumatic. Yeah, I've seen people from that reaction and gastroparesis and I'm like, well, of course that's not a pleasant experience. You're not going to want to do that again.

Yeah. No way. And then also like you're prepping your body for post semaglutide or micro dosing maintenance, where you can continue to be on this a little bit more long term, but at the micro doses, so you've got your appetite back and you're learning how to live with the appetite again.

But then if you're doing all of this, like if you're doing the detox support and stuff like that, to have a successful journey, weight loss journey, or a more successful journey, then when you go to titrate off and you go want to go to that maintenance dose, your liver and your body has biologically like It's starting to, to recorrect itself.

Labs, Safety, and Clinical Use

It's not going to want that rebound weight because you've been doing stuff to keep stuff moving and get it out. Exactly. Exactly. Moving and grooving.

Totally moving and grooving. I know we, we started talking more and more about the weight loss side, but I think that tangent was well worth the detour.

If we circling back to just more of the micro dosing and the inflammation, you know, inflammation is. One thing that we say in integrative and functional medicine is it's the root of all chronic disease, right?

So, realistically, for autoimmune conditions and, you know, these inflammatory-driven diseases, semaglutide or GLP-1s, tear zepatide, all the other ones that are coming out now, too.

There's so many now. These are all, like, these all have a place in chronic disease management and reversal of conditions. Yes, I was just having actually a conversation with a new patient right before coming on here who has been just so sick for so long and got issues, the whole shebang.

And she was even asking, well, what about a GLP-1 for? of helping with this process and we need to get her labs back and all that stuff. But I'm like, absolutely.

You know, like this in a micro dose, your body is so inflamed. It is so hyper reactive. Yeah. Her immune system is also tanked. She gets sick with everything.

Anytime the cold, flu, COVID, whatever comes around that your body needs support to reset. And GLP ones are proving successful at lowering the immune markers.

boosting the anti-inflammatory catecholamine things in the body. And it's just, it's very impressive. So I'm like, yeah, we can definitely take a look at that to add to your care.

And the people who have been, what's been really interesting is the people who have these conditions. that they're like, okay, I need to lose like 15, 20 pounds, right?

Just a little, just a little zhuzh. Just the microdosing can do that with just reducing your inflammation. If you're holding on to so much weight or, you know, like just the inflammation.

Yes. You can drop that extra, that last five. That's exactly it. I don't think yet with my patients that I've had to put anybody over 20 units a week.

because they're getting the results from the inflammation lowering of the micro thing. But then again, they have these other conditions like autoimmune, et cetera.

And they are like, hey, I'm actually feeling better, brighter, more energy. That's a big one. I have more energy. Then again, knowing that you can have a little decrease in energy in that initial detox, but also understand if once you get that inflammation down in your past, you know, some detoxing that people are bouncing back bigger and brighter with their energy levels than ever.

Yeah. You mentioned something, you're waiting for labs to come back. What labs are important for you when you are prescribing or talking about semi-glutite or GLP ones with patients?

Totally. I just want to make sure their thyroid and hormone levels are coming back okay because sometimes they're root cause is actually you have severe hypothyroid and you didn't know it, and you have to correct that first for, you know, you're gained weight because you have a bad thyroid.

So things like that, like we gotta make sure those things are not at play. But then also, I want to make sure they're not hypoglycemic. I've had patients come back with their fasting glucose in the 50s, and I'm just like, okay, time out.

We may need to just check out what's causing that and work on your health from another perspective. I don't want to risk tanking you into further hypoglycemic.

Absolutely. Things like that. That's good. Love that. So Forum Health, we kind of take a different approach than conventional GLP use, which today is weight loss and hype to diabetes, right?

I am putting out in the universe that there are so many more applications to this. It's not just weight loss, it's cardio metabolic, it's for the biohackers out there, and it's also for the chronic disease.

I mean, it really hits the spectrum.

GLP-1s as a Functional Medicine Tool

Right. We use different at Forum. We do have your traditional use in the weight loss, but we also approach with microdosing for all of those different patient types just to, I mean, I think the biggest thing is get that inflammation down, but there's so many more benefits as well.

A hundred percent. You know, and the big studies right now that have been mostly done on people with type 2 diabetes and obesity are definitely the cardio metabolic protection, the kidney protection, improving of kidney, non-alcoholic fatty liver has been shown a reverse of GOP1s, which is big.

And then again, the Alzheimer's and then the obstructive sleep apnea actually. Fertility and L2. and fertility and fertility is another. Yeah. I mean, it's just when you can lower inflammation, what can't you do?

What can't we do? Can't we do? It's all possible. And like you said early on, Amanda, this is already naturally creating the body. I have a lot of theories as to why we are lower on GOP production in our body.

I think it's a six by of like, you know, we are more inflamed, therefore our body's producing less of it. but then it's the thing that also helps reduce the inflammation.

So it's, I think just- What do we need in our diets in order for our body to produce and deliver is fiber, which we don't get enough fiber in our diets anymore.

And we've been chronically absent of that. So how that affected the overall production and levels in our bodies, I think that that plays a role into it.

the different types of fiber makes a difference in order for your body to prove it. I mean, that's a whole nother topic. That's a whole nother topic for a whole nother podcast.

Yes, but there are ways, you are absolutely right. There are ways to, you know, help our naturally occurring GLP-1. And that's for another podcast. I think that'd be a good podcast, to be honest.

Yes, yes. But it's so true. But what we do know is that getting those levels back to optimal, lowering that inflammation, because everything's connected in the body, that's why it's showing such promising effects in all of these areas of chronic disease, which, of course, in functional medicine, we see as all rooted down to inflammation.

Absolutely. It's not like a miracle drug, but it makes sense. Yeah, it does. The math is math. The math is math-ing. The math is math-ing. GLPs are more than weight loss medications.

They're tools for healing inflammation, balancing metabolism, restoring brain and body function, and even addressing chronic inflammatory diseases. When combined with functional medicine, lifestyle, nutrition, they can help people not only lose weight, but truly feel well again.

Erica, thank you so much for sharing your insight and experience with us today. It's incredible to see how GLP ones are helping patients far beyond weight loss, from reducing inflammation to improving brain health and energy.

If you'd like to learn more about GLP-1 therapy or find a form health provider near you, you can visit formhealth.com. And as always, thank you for listening to the Form Health Integrative Medicine Podcast, where we talk the science stories and the healing from the inside out.

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