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## Novo Nordisk Gets Close to Launching the First Oral GLP-1 Drug for Diabetes

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BY ALEXANDER BURIK  
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Novo Nordisk has positive Phase III trial results for its oral version of semaglutide, a GLP-1 based treatment for type II diabetes. This could be the first oral GLP-1 treatment on the market, making it easier for patients to take the drug.

After obtaining approval for an injected version, **Novo Nordisk** is now getting ready to launch what could be the first oral version of a GLP-1 drug to treat type 2 diabetes. **Glucagon-like peptide (GLP)-1** receptor agonists are a key innovation in first-line treatments for type II [diabetes](#). They act by increasing the body's levels of **insulin**, a hormone that lowers blood sugar levels, while decreasing levels of glucagon, produced by the body a hormone that increases blood sugar levels.

Novo Nordisk's oral **semaglutide** is a GLP-1 analogue taken once daily as a tablet, which would be more convenient for patients than treatments administered by injections. The Phase III results show that **80% of patients** receiving the highest dose had **low long-term blood sugar levels**, compared to 34% of patients treated with placebo. If launched, it may be the first oral GLP-1 treatment for type 2 diabetes to enter the market.

Out of the contenders in the GLP-1 treatment market, Novo Nordisk's injected version of semaglutide along with Eli Lilly's Trulicity stand out because they only need to be administered by injection once a week. Importantly, the [injected version of semaglutide](#) sets itself apart from Trulicity through greater **reductions in blood sugar** and double the amount of **weight loss**. Novo's oral version of semaglutide could make the treatment even more accessible to patients.



Eli Lilly remains confident in their market position, though, [stating](#) Novo will be competing with other, **non-oral diabetes treatments**, such as Jardiance and Merck's Steglatro. But these drugs have a different mechanism of action, targeting a molecule known as **SGLT2** to prevent the kidneys from reabsorbing sugar into the blood.

Semaglutide's GLP-1 mechanism of action may be more effective, since its **double action** of increasing insulin and decreasing glucagon could result in a more widespread lowering of blood sugar levels.

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Novo faces competition from other contenders as well. Last year, **Zealand Pharma** and [Sanofi](#) launched **Suliqua** in the US as a treatment for type 2 diabetes. Suliqua uses a combination long-acting insulin and the GLP-1 receptor agonist lixisenatide. However, the **market landscape** for diabetes treatment is constantly changing. **Intarcia**, a US biotech, had to terminate two Phase III trials in January after the FDA rejected its drug-delivery device for type 2 diabetes.

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