

# Want a more affordable version of Ozempic? SLIMR is one option

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Special to FLORIDA TODAY

Amy Diel was at wit's end with her weight.

"I wanted to lose 50 pounds and had tried everything you can think of — a 1,200-calorie-a-day restrictive diet, excessive exercise, oral meds, the weight loss programs, cutting out all carbs. Nothing worked."

Then a friend told her about Slimr, a medical weight loss program that relies on injectables Semaglutide and Tirzepatide, part of a new family of anti-obesity medications called GLP-1s used to treat Type 2 diabetes.

These meds target the hypothalamus, the "hunger" part of the brain, that determines how hungry a person is.

By slowing down the rate at which food moves through the digestive system and by telling the brain the stomach is full, appetite is reduced.

Smaller quantities of food satisfy for longer and food cravings are minimized. That juicy steak or delicious doughnut don't tempt.

More calories are burned than consumed and thus the patient experiences a calorie deficit which results in weight loss.

Semaglutide and Tirzepatide compare well with other weight loss alternatives.

Individuals typically lose 2 to 7 percent of their weight with exercise and lifestyle changes and up to 10 percent with first-generation anti-obesity medications such as Phentermine.

With gastric sleeves or bypasses, patients can experience up to 40 percent weight loss.

Semaglutide and Tirzepatide safely offers up to 25 percent weight loss, according to the New England Journal of Medicine.

Semaglutide contains the same active ingredients as Wegovy and Ozempic, weight loss medications that have been embraced by celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Charles Barkley and Elon Musk.

The difference between the brand name meds and Slimr's lies in the cost, for Wegovy and Ozempic can retail for more than a thousand dollars a month and insurance rarely covers the cost of these weight loss drugs.

Slimr, on the other hand, starts at approximately \$300 for the low-dose Semaglutide and \$400 for the higher dose plan.

Diel was skeptical, but given that her friend had lost 47 pounds in six months, she figured she had nothing to lose but weight.

"With complete hesitation, I reached out," she joked.

Slimr did not offer Diel a miracle, but rather slow but steady weight loss she has been able to sustain.

Patients inject the medications, typically in the stomach or thigh, once a week, with a needle similar to those used in injections for diabetes.

The program requires commitment to a healthy lifestyle for permanent weight loss, made easier by a team of medical professionals that include dietitians, success coaches and relationship managers who offer motivation and guidance.

"Support during your weight loss



**Leslie Atanasova has lost 60 pounds using Slimr.** PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MARIA SONNENBERG/SPECIAL TO FLORIDA TODAY



**Leslie Atanasova has gone from 187 pounds to 127 pounds using Slimr.**

journey with GLP-1s is paramount for sustainable success," said Dr. Emran Imami, Slimr's national chief medical officer. He is also the founder of Imami Skin & Cosmetic Center in Melbourne.

"Our coaches guide patients through a variety of topics like dosage, injection, nutrition plans and other frequently asked questions."

Success coaches like Leslie Atanasova have gone through the program themselves, and know the challenges and triumphs that await new patients. One year into the program, Atanasova has gone from 187 to 127 pounds.

BMI of 27 or greater, although based on patient's gender or ethnicity, a BMI as low as 23.5 is acceptable.

Diel has been stunned by the results. She started losing two to three pounds a week. She is currently 37 pounds down and sees her 50-pound goal as highly attainable.

"I never felt more comfortable in my relationship with food," she said.

Studies of 1.7 million obese patients report that those who lost weight reduced their chances of a heart attack by 50 percent, says Imami.

Sarasota resident Edward Daly admits he was always about 20 pounds over his ideal weight. After a heart attack in 2014, he quit smoking, but started gaining weight.

"Most people think men aren't concerned about weight, but it's not true," Daly said. "My weight got me into a funk."

Daly joined the Slimr program three months ago after an initial telehealth consultation with a licensed APRN.

"I thought it was going to be four or five minutes, but it was probably around 50 minutes," he said. "We discussed expectations, questions and concerns."

He has lost more than 23 pounds since he started, and Slimr has not affected his enjoyment of a meal.

"In the past, when I would go to a restaurant, I'd make sure to clear the plate," he said. "Before, if I made myself a sandwich, I'd go and make two sandwiches. Now, I don't feel the need, but I still enjoy my meal 100 percent. I eat as much as I want, but I don't want to eat too much. I'm also satisfied with drinking less alcohol, too."

Although some side effects exist, Daly did not experience any.

Diel, on the other hand, had headaches that eventually subsided.

Constipation is common, as is nausea and diarrhea, but these usually resolve after a few doses.

"At first, you might feel a little sluggish and constipated, but it helps to drink more water, get moving or take magnesium or a stool softener," said success coach Carrie Rethwisch.

Some patients have even opted for Slimr before undergoing procedures such as knee replacement, spine, bariatric or cosmetic surgeries, since a healthier weight increased the chance of a better outcome.

Weight loss also improves health problems such as heart disease, sleep apnea, high cholesterol, arthritis, mental health and decreased intimacy.

Studies back the drug's effectiveness. In a series of studies known as the Semaglutide Treatment Effect in People with Obesity, 32 percent of patients lost 20 percent of weight from their baseline, versus only 17 percent with placebo.

A 2022 study in the New England Journal of Medicine notes that 57 percent of the 2,539 overweight and obese adults had at least a 20 percent weight loss with Tirzepatide, as opposed to only three percent in the non-treated group.

It may not be a miracle drug, but for patients like Daly, it's pretty close.

"I hate to use the word life-changing, but it is," Daly said. "I feel so much better about myself."

For more information, visit [slimr.com](http://slimr.com).

"It has been a godsend to me," she said.

Atanasova emphasizes the medication is only part of the answer for maintaining a healthy weight.

"The medication slows digestion and curbs appetite, but at the end of the day, you will do better when you incorporate healthy lifestyle choices with Slimr," Atanasova said.

However, as weight starts to drop, patients typically experience renewed energy, which motivates exercise and helps keep the weight off.

Most patients transition to a maintenance dose of Semaglutide or Tirzepatide rather than quit cold turkey.

Current consultations with certified nurse practitioners to determine eligibility are only available online through smartphones or computers.

These telehealth video consultations are open to all Florida residents, though Slimr is expanding nationally.

Not all patients qualify.

Patients who are allergic to the medication, are pregnant or plan a pregnancy in the next three months, have Juvenile (Type 1) diabetes, have a history of medullary thyroid cancer or have a rare condition known as Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia 2 may not be eligible.

Currently, the program accepts only adults 18 and older who are overweight or obese, as defined by body-mass index (BMI), waist circumference or percent of body fat.

A general eligibility threshold is a