

“Our oral semaglutide for diabetes treatment costs around Rs 10k/month”

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Novo Nordisk has launched the world’s first and only GLP-1 receptor analogue (GLP-1 RA)- Oral Semaglutide in India. With Semaglutide, indicated for the management of type 2 diabetes being developed in an oral formulation for the first time, it is expected to be a game-changer for people with type 2 diabetes who prefer oral medications over injections.



To find out more about this innovative solution, BioSpectrum spoke to Vikrant Shrotriya, Corporate Vice President and Managing Director, Novo Nordisk India in detail. Edited excerpts;

What are the unique advantages being offered by this pill?

Oral semaglutide is a co-formulation of GLP-1RA semaglutide with an absorption enhancer SNAC which protects semaglutide from undergoing degradation in the stomach like other peptides and enhances its absorption. Novo Nordisk invested 15 years of continuous research, innovation, and development to make oral formulation of semaglutide into a reality. Due to this scientific breakthrough, it received the Prix Galien Award in 2020, a prestigious award in the industry, for the best biotech innovation. It has undergone 10 rigorous Phase 3a clinical trials called PIONEER, across several countries including India. The completed and ongoing global trials with oral semaglutide includes more than 10,000 patients of which more than 1,000 participants are from India. In addition to the unprecedented glycemic control, oral semaglutide demonstrated unsurpassed weight loss and consistent cardiovascular safety in clinical trials. Oral semaglutide has been approved by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) in 2020.

What changes are you expecting with this new launch in the Indian market?

India is the sixth country, after the US and European region, where the semaglutide pill has been commercially launched. With a strong clinical profile, we believe, it has the potential to revolutionise the treatment of type 2 diabetes, given that millions of people do not achieve the targeted blood sugar levels with currently available oral antidiabetic medications. Its launch coincides with our hundred-year centenary of insulin discovery, which changed the life of people with diabetes needing insulin.

How cost-effective is it when compared to injection-based treatment?

The oral semaglutide will cost Rs 315 per pill or around Rs 10000 for a full month treatment. We have brought in India-based pricing to ensure access of oral semaglutide to every person living with diabetes who needs it. The cost is currently equivalent to other GLP-1 injectables available in the market. Another key important factor we have looked at is that the pricing of higher doses of oral semaglutide doesn't increase more than 8-10 per cent. This in fact makes the cost of treatment with oral semaglutide much lesser than many other injectables. Interestingly, the cost of oral semaglutide is much lesser as compared to the current price in the US.

What marketing strategies are in place for rapid availability of this product across India? How do you plan to increase more awareness around it?

We already have a very robust distribution mechanism in place owing to our 80+ years of uninterrupted supply of insulins in India. We are leveraging this existing distribution channel to ensure the availability of oral semaglutide across every nook and corner of the country. We are committed to ensuring that oral semaglutide is available to every person with diabetes who needs it. Oral semaglutide is already available in the nearest pharmacies, and by the end of January, it will also be available in the farthest corners of the country.

Lack of awareness and education on diabetes has always been our biggest competitor. We believe awareness and early initiation of treatment can go a long way in ensuring better management of diabetes and further reducing diabetes related complications. We will continue our CME (continued medical education) programmes with healthcare professionals and disease awareness programmes for people living with diabetes to address this need.

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