

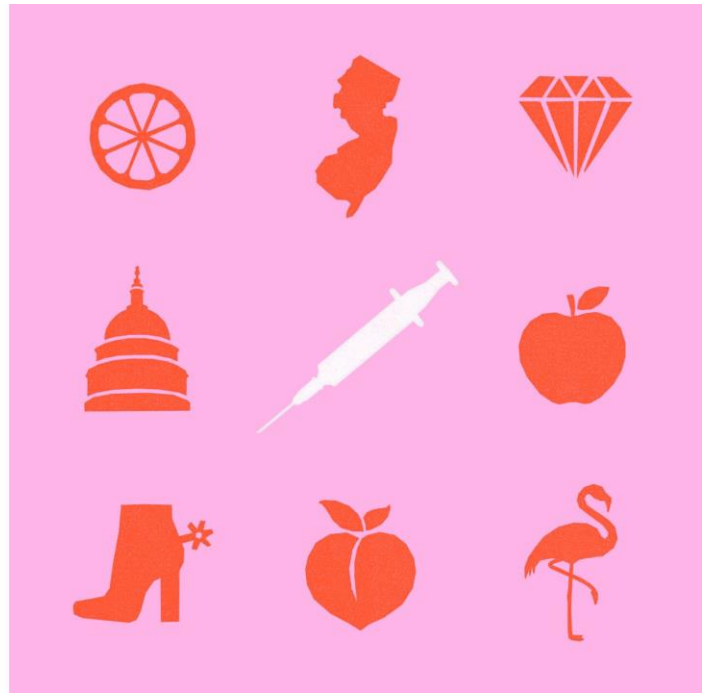
# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## ‘What Housewife Isn’t on Ozempic?’ How a Weight-Loss Craze Is Shaping Reality TV

Stars and producers of Bravo’s hit franchise are amplifying a debate about whether new drugs that show promise for weight loss are being prescribed too liberally

By [Sara Ashley O’Brien](#) [Follow](#)

April 25, 2023 10:03 am ET



“You’re looking *thin*,” Andy Cohen told “Real Housewives of New Jersey” star Dolores Catania on a recent episode of his late-night Bravo talk show.

“Ozempy?” he asked.

Mr. Cohen was talking about [Ozempic](#), a Type 2 diabetes drug that is part of a group of injections [changing weight loss](#) as we know it. Ms. Catania said that yes, she was taking the drug, but clarified in a segment of the show posted online that it was actually Mounjaro, a competitor.

“That’s the amped-up version,” said Marysol Patton, a “Real Housewives of Miami” cast member who was seated beside Ms. Catania. “That’s the fast-forward to Skinnyville.”



Though these drugs are relatively new, reality TV stars speak about them with familiarity and frequency, as if they were unofficial characters in Bravo’s “Real Housewives” universe. Mr. Cohen, the franchise’s executive producer, first helped establish the connection in September, when he tweeted to his 2.4 million followers, “Everyone is suddenly showing up 25 pounds lighter. What happens when they stop taking [#Ozempic](#) ?????” In the “Watch What Happens Live With Andy Cohen” segment with Ms. Catania, Mr. Cohen stoked the flames again: “What Housewife isn’t on Ozempic?” he said. “Not one,” Ms. Catania replied. “Half your cast,” Mr. Cohen said.

Though these drugs are relatively new, reality TV stars speak about them with familiarity and frequency, as if they were unofficial characters in Bravo’s “Real Housewives” universe. Mr. Cohen, the franchise’s executive producer, first helped establish the connection in September, when he tweeted to his 2.4 million followers, “Everyone is suddenly showing up 25 pounds lighter. What happens when they stop taking [#Ozempic](#) ?????” In the “Watch What Happens Live With Andy Cohen” segment with Ms. Catania, Mr. Cohen stoked the flames again: “What Housewife isn’t on Ozempic?” he said. “Not one,” Ms. Catania replied. “Half your cast,” Mr. Cohen said.

Every week, another star from the show's orbit speaks out about GLP-1s—a class of drugs that includes [Novo Nordisk's Ozempic](#) and Wegovy, as well as [Eli Lilly's Mounjaro](#). Mentions need no introductions from producers, podcasters or posters in online forums. While the Bravo juggernaut has been known for candid discussions about sensitive topics like plastic surgery and eating disorders, the spotlight on these injections is amplifying a debate about whether they are being prescribed too liberally. (Wegovy is approved by the FDA to treat obesity. Ozempic and Mounjaro are not, though providers may prescribe them off-label for weight loss.)

Bravo stars who speak openly about using the drugs say they're doing what they were hired to do: Be real. While there has been speculation about widespread Hollywood use, reality TV stars are among the rare celebrities who have been upfront about weight loss resulting from GLP-1s.

"I think Housewives on the whole are very honest. So, everybody weaponizes everything they do against them," said Margaret Josephs, a Real Housewife of New Jersey, who has been taking compounded semaglutide—the active ingredient in Ozempic and Wegovy—since last spring, in addition to [peptides](#). "It wasn't about, 'Oh I want to be thin.' I really want to feel good and looking great was a bonus." Still, her weight loss has drawn tabloid coverage. "I really have no shame in it."

Fans and the celebrity press have made a sport of speculating on who might be taking the drugs, and some stars have faced backlash as a result. Several Housewives have denied use, with some offering up alternative explanations. Some fans aren't convinced.

"Apparently a lot of people think I'm taking Ozempic," Kyle Richards of "The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" said on a January podcast hosted by two women of "Housewives" fame. "To clarify, I've never taken Ozempic, never tried Ozempic, and I'm not taking the other one that starts with an 'M.'" She said she'd had a breast reduction, curbed sugar and carbs, cut out alcohol, in addition to working out.

On a recent episode of "The Real Housewives of Miami," which streams on Peacock, Ms. Patton and her co-star Alexia Nepola visit a "fat doctor" for a "fat-burning shot" that is meant to be taken weekly, just like Ozempic and its cousin drugs. The name of the clinic is prominently displayed on the show, and its website lists GLP-1 injections among its offerings. "Am I tripping or did Marysol introduce us to her Ozempic prescribing doctor?" one person tweeted.

In a statement, Ms. Nepola said, "We affectionately call him the 'Fat Doctor' because that's what he's known for in Miami... We were there to get a vitamin shot." Ms. Patton has denied taking Ozempic and could not be reached for comment. The clinic did not return requests for comment.



“I just think everyone should just be honest about what they’re doing because I think it sends the wrong message to say ‘Look at me, this is diet and exercise,’” said David Yontef, whose daily podcast “Behind the Velvet Rope” dissects reality shows including the “Real Housewives” franchise. He clips segments of the show for YouTube with headlines like: “Why Won’t These Specific Real Housewives Admit They Are on Ozempic?” Mr. Yontef, who is taking a GLP-1 himself, speaks candidly on his show about his own experience.

He said that the drugs are rumored to have come up during filming of the coming season of “The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,” which is under way. A representative for the show declined to comment.

Ms. Catania, who was frank about using Mounjaro on “Watch What Happens Live,” walked back her words in a subsequent interview, as did her doctor, Rocio Salas-Whalen.

“I have no control of what she’s going to say on live TV,” said Dr. Salas-Whalen, an endocrinologist and obesity physician. “There’s a reason behind why the patient is on the medication. Without going into details about her health, the way that she presented it to the public, that is different.”

Mr. Cohen’s exchange with Ms. Catania received some backlash, which he acknowledged on his [Sirius XM](#) radio show. He didn’t want to glorify thinness, he said, but he felt it was important to stay true to the show’s candor around bodies. “This was, I think, one of the first shows that showed people getting Botox and talking about their breast enhancements and all that stuff,” he said on-air. “I think that there are millions of women at home who look at these women and want to know, ‘What did they have done?’”

“I’m trying to deliver the goods, though, for my audience who are watching,” said Mr. Cohen, who had several listeners call in to share their perspectives on the topic. “If Dolores shows up 15 pounds lighter, I gotta find out how it happened.” Through a representative, Mr. Cohen declined to comment.

Dr. Reshmi Srinath, medical director of Mount Sinai Hospital’s weight and metabolism management program, said that popular culture can help increase awareness about health treatments. But a quick mention in a TV show can also have an adverse effect, leading viewers to believe a pharmaceutical approved to treat specific diseases is a “magic drug.”



“We have to keep in mind what the data shows, and that there are some patients that don’t respond at all,” Dr. Srinath said. She also cited side effects such as gastrointestinal issues, ranging from upset stomach and nausea to severe reflux and gallstones, and stressed the importance of adequate nutrition. According to experts, the drugs may need to be [taken long-term](#) to keep weight off.

Gossip about the drugs has become so rampant that moderators of a “Real Housewives” Reddit forum banned speculative “Ozempic” discussion last month. (If a Housewife has commented on use, it’s fine to talk about that.) Dozens of posts a day are flagged by users for mentioning Ozempic, according to a moderator.

Jackie Goldschneider of “The Real Housewives of New Jersey” said she first learned about Ozempic in the fall, after the show’s current season had stopped filming. “All of a sudden I feel like out of nowhere, I started seeing it and hearing about it everywhere.”

She is in recovery for anorexia and said it was jarring to see her peers eating such reduced portions. (The drugs have an appetite-curbing effect.) “To go out to dinner and be the only person really eating—that, for me, was very difficult,” she said, noting that she confronted the issue but received pushback.

“I don’t think anyone wants to be judged for their decisions,” she said. “And I get that, because for a very long time, I had the most unhealthy relationship with food and I never wanted to be judged for it.”

Ms. Goldschneider knows the focus on reality stars comes with the territory of being public figures. She sees them as a microcosm of a conversation that is taking place around the world, as people looking to lose weight clamor for Ozempic, Wegovy and Mounjaro prescriptions.

“It’s so much bigger than the ‘Housewives’ franchise,” she said.