

BEFORE YOU BLOCK

Staying Healthy with Dr. Aieta, N.D.

Drugs intended to treat heartburn, like Nexium or Prilosec, are among the most widely prescribed medicines in the United States and account for more than \$13 billion in annual sales.

So, then, are there any risks to these miracle drugs that everyone is taking?

Some new research has linked these drugs to an increased risk of developing pneumonia, hip fractures, macular degeneration, nutrient deficiencies and cancer.

It seems that one out of every five patients that I see these days is on these acid-blockers to treat heartburn or acid reflux. These drugs don't just slightly reduce stomach acid, they actually work to shut down acid production altogether.

Let's not focus on my natural treatment for heartburn, since I've addressed it in past columns. Instead, I want to make people aware of some of the harmful side effects associated with such drugs.

A study published last December in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* involved 150,000 individuals who were followed from 1987 to 2003. That study demonstrated that people who are on proton pump inhibitors (medications that totally shut off stomach acid

production) have a significantly higher risk of suffering a hip fracture. The data suggested that these hip fractures were caused by poor calcium and other mineral absorption resulting from the stomach-acid suppression.

Having low stomach acid also increases your risk of developing pneumonia, according to another study in *JAMA*, which followed 360,000 individuals. The people on acid blockers were 4.5 times more likely to develop pneumonia than people who never used the drugs. Apparently, without acid in the stomach, bad bacteria from the intestines may move into the lungs and lead to infection.

In 2005, researchers noted that acid-blocking drugs significantly increased the risk of age-related macular degeneration, which causes blindness, due to the inability to absorb essential nutrients for eye health, such as selenium, zinc and vitamin C, among others.

In addition patients who have been on the acid blockers for a long time are almost always found to be B-12 deficient, as the body needs to break down the vitamin with stomach acid before it is absorbed in the intestines.



Finally, in an animal study done in 2005, it was shown that mice that were genetically engineered to lack acid production (similar to being on acid blocking drugs) all developed cancerous stomach tumors and died after 12 months, while the normal mice lived much longer, cancer-free lives.

So, before you decide to take that acid-blocking drug for your heartburn or acid reflux, visit a naturopathic physician for a safer approach.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board-certified and licensed Naturopathic Physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com, or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

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