



natural heartburn remedies

Popular Heartburn Drugs May Be Doing You Harm

You and your doctor should discuss the harmful side effects of proton pump inhibitor drugs before you take them, suggests new research.

By Leah Zerbe

what you can do:

Try natural heartburn remedies before resorting to prescription or over-the-counter heartburn medications.

RODALE NEWS, EMMAUS, PA—A popular class of heartburn medicine commonly used to treat gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, could be causing patients more harm than good, and doctors need to consider harmful side effects before automatically putting their patients on proton pump inhibitor medications, according to a series of studies published last month in the journal *Archives of Internal Medicine*. GERD can result in painful inflammation of the esophagus, as well as ulcers in the stomach and small intestine. The prescription proton pump inhibitors typically used to treat this malady include: Nexium, Dexilant, Prilosec, Zegerid, Prevacid, Protonix, Aciphex, and Vimovo. Over-the-counter versions include Prilosec OTC (omeprazole), Zegerid OTC (omeprazole), and Prevacid 24HR (lansoprazole).

THE DETAILS: In the collection of five studies published in the journal, researchers found some startling statistics regarding the use of proton pump inhibitors. Among them:

- Using proton pump inhibitor medication daily increases the risk of developing the increasingly severe and hard-to-treat bacterial infection *Clostridium difficile*, also known as *C. diff*, by nearly 75 percent. Another study found patients being treated for *C. diff* while on proton

pump inhibitors had a 42 percent increased risk of recurrence of C. diff compared with those not on the inhibitors.

- Use of proton pump inhibitors is linked to a higher incidence of fractures in postmenopausal women, including wrist and spinal fractures.
- High-dose proton pump inhibitors do not reduce the rates of additional bleeding, the need to have surgery, or death in patients with bleeding ulcers compared to regular-dose proton pump inhibitors.

These studies are part of the journal's new series, "Less Is More," which spotlights areas where your health may worsen when you receive too much medical care.

WHAT IT MEANS: In some cases, certainly, proton pump inhibitors are the only thing that works for patients. However, the study authors suggest there is far too much overprescribing of heartburn medicine. More than 113 million prescriptions for this type of drug are filled every year in the U.S. In an editorial published with the studies, Mitchell H. Katz, MD, spokesman for the San Francisco Department of Public Health, says that more than half of proton pump inhibitor prescriptions are for ailments the medicine doesn't even help. "Harm will result if these commonly used medications are prescribed for conditions for which there is no benefit, such as non-ulcer dyspepsia," say authors of another editorial.

Here are some simple, non-invasive options to help you douse the burn.

- **Lose weight.** Mayo Clinic researchers found that even modest weight loss from eating better and/or exercising more significantly cuts acid reflux and heartburn symptoms.
- **Avoid these relaxers.** Certain foods and drinks relax your lower esophageal sphincter, making it harder for the valve to keep acid in your stomach where it belongs. These include mints, tomatoes, beer, wine, and other alcoholic drinks.
- **Raise the head of our bed.** Nothing can be worse than trying to fall asleep—and stay asleep—with GERD. Prop your head up a bit—perhaps with a second pillow—and gravity will help keep the acid down. Or place boards under one end of the bed to create a slightly

downward slope.

For more ideas that may help your GERD, see our story on [natural heartburn remedies](#) and visit the [Rodale Home Remedies Finder](#).