7 Hidden Dangers of **Heartburn Drugs**

They're widely used, yet **new studies** link them to a wide range of serious, even deadly, ailments.

YOU MOST LIKELY HAVE heard about the dangers of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) — heartburn medications that have become some of the most widely used drugs in America.

But new studies bring new warnings about PPIs like Prilosec (omeprazole), Nexium (esomeprazole), and Prevacid (lansoprazole), especially when users take them regularly for months, or years.

They face increased risk of serious conditions or even dying from diseases like cancer. Here are some of the dangers linked to these medications.

1 HEART DISEASE

In a new study published last year in the respected BMJ (formerly the British Medical Journal), medical scientists followed more than 200,000 U.S. veterans for 10 years.

When they weighed other factors, including age and chronic health conditions, PPI use was tied to almost an 18 percent higher risk of cardiovascular death.

"The evidence is clear," lead researcher Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly tells Newsmax. "PPI use is associated with serious risks." Al-Aly is an assistant professor at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri.

2 DEMENTIA

The dementia-PPI risk is hotly debated, but one study, involving 73,000 men and women over 75 who did not have dementia and who began taking a PPI, is significant.

Over five years, nearly 40 percent of them developed Alzheimer's disease or a form of dementia. The results were published in the JAMA Neurology journal.

While the results were compelling, they didn't provide a conclusive link. Rather, the outcomes reinforce the importance of talking to your doctor before taking these meds.

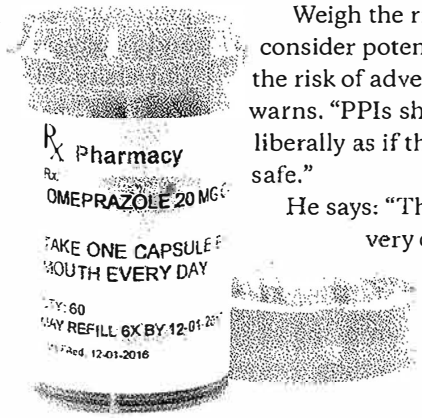
3 OSTEOPOROSIS

About 20 percent of all women age 50 and over develop osteoporosis, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation. And after studies researched a link between the debilitating bone disease and PPI use, the Food and Drug Administration responded by issuing a warning way back in 2010.

4 GASTROENTERITIS

It might seem counterintuitive that a drug designed to ease stomach problems would actually increase the risk of intestinal infection, but that's exactly what research has shown.

One large study followed more than 200,000 people taking PPIs between 2015 and 2016. Though the risk of infection was only 1.3 percent, patients 45 and older were twice as likely to develop gastroenteritis. The study's results were published in JAMA Network Open Journal last year.



5 STOMACH CANCER

Stomach cancer is one of the most deadly diseases, and a study published last year in the respected Gastroenterology Review, which examined previous inconsistent findings, showed an increased cancer risk with PPI use.

The results indicated that patients who had used PPIs for more than 36 months were almost three times as likely to develop gastric cancer.

6 VITAMIN B DEFICIENCY

Vitamin B is essential for all cell metabolism, and stomach acid releases vitamin B, so the use of any drug that suppresses stomach acid is a red flag. A study done by Kaiser Permanente examined data for more than 200,000 patients who used PPIs for a long time — two years or more — and discovered a 65 percent increased risk for vitamin B deficiency. The results were reported by the journal Mayo Clinic Proceedings.

7 KIDNEY DISEASE

There have been many studies examining PPI use and the risk of deadly kidney disease. In a study published in JAMA Internal Medicine, 10,482 participants with normal kidney function were followed for about 14 years.

Their data was then correlated with PPI use. The PPI users in the group had a 20 to 50 percent greater risk of developing chronic kidney disease than nonusers.

Weigh the risks. "People should consider potential benefits and the risk of adverse events," Al-Aly warns. "PPIs should not be used liberally as if they are completely safe."

He says: "They should be used very carefully, only when medically needed, and for the shortest duration possible." □

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