



Risks of Proton Pump Inhibitor Use

In recent months, there has been significant press citing a possible link between the use of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) and various medical problems, such as an increased association with heart attacks, kidney disease and, most recently, dementia. We at Atlanta Gastroenterology Associates have prepared the following points to clarify the current state of medical knowledge on this issue and to help you understand any risk associated with PPI medications you may be taking for your own medical condition.

- PPIs are the most commonly prescribed medication for the treatment of acid reflux and other acid related diseases, such as gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), gastritis, and peptic ulcer disease. They reduce the production of acid by blocking the enzyme in the wall of the stomach that produces acid. These medications emerged in the late 1970s and have been used safely for almost 40 years. Common PPI names include Prilosec®, Nexium®, Zegerid®, Protonix®, Aciphex®, and Prevacid®.
- All medical interventions and medications, including PPIs, have associated risks and side effects. It is up to the physician and the patient to discuss the risks and side effects of any intervention and weigh them against the anticipated benefit in order to determine the appropriate course of action.
- The study showing these recent findings is based on following a population of German patients aged 75 years and older over a seven year period. It shows that patients receiving regular PPIs were more likely to develop incident dementia compared with those not taking PPIs. However it did not account for other well-recognized risk factors for dementia such as family history, heavy alcohol use, hypertension, and atherosclerosis. It did not use validated ways of establishing the diagnosis of dementia or adjust for use of other medicines that have been associated with dementia.

The few recent reports on PPIs use general data looking for trends. While they raise important clinical questions, they do not demonstrate causation and may falsely assume an actual relationship between PPIs and adverse outcomes.

What do we take from this?

- Based on recommendations from experts in the field, the benefits of PPI use still outweigh the risks, although it is always advisable to use the lowest effective dose for the shortest period of time. Most patients only require these medications episodically, but some patients suffer from more chronic conditions, requiring prolonged use of medications. For these patients, the benefits of preventing more serious complications such as ulcers, swallowing trouble, and esophageal cancer outweigh the risks of PPI use.
- Patients with further questions or concerns may send a message to their provider via the patient portal, call the office to speak to their physician's medical assistant who will relay the message to the physician, or make an appointment for an office visit with their physician.

For more information about GERD, please visit <https://www.atlantagastro.com/content/gerd>.