Long-term Use of Proton Pump Inhibitor Medication and GERD

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Recently, an interesting article in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) showed that ambulatory patients taking acid suppressing medications have a greater risk of developing pneumonia. This was a Dutch study that evaluated 364,683 patients, 5551 of whom developed pneumonia over an 8-year period. By reviewing the medical records, they were compared to a group of patients who did not develop pneumonia. Patients who had ever used gastric acid suppressing drugs were 4.5 times more likely to develop pneumonia compared to the general population. However, several things need to be pointed out. Patients that were actually taking acid suppression were a little less than twice as likely to develop pneumonia. Patients with pneumonia were also more likely to have diabetes, heart failure, lung disease, be taking immune suppressing medications, and more frequently used antibiotics in the previous year. There was no mention of the outcome, such as the seriousness of the pneumonia, or if any deaths occurred. The authors estimated that, at worst, there was only one episode of pneumonia that may be directly attributable to a PPI for every 100 patient-years of treatment!

This new information simply calls for some common sense. You should not be taking medications that you don’t need. Ask your doctor if you need to be taking something, such as the PPI’s, to control your heartburn or indigestion. Ask if your dose could be decreased. Be more vigilant if you have diabetes, heart failure, lung disease, or another systemic illness. Most patients will need to stay on their medications, which is fine. Even if there is a risk of developing pneumonia as a result of taking a PPI, that risk is extremely small.

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This article is in no way intended to replace the knowledge or diagnosis of your doctor. We advise seeing a physician whenever a health problem arises requiring an expert’s care.

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