

[IMAGE]

## Heartburn Drugs Aren't Worth the Risk

By Editorial Staff

Faced with heartburn, ulcers or acid reflux – or cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney disease or upper gastrointestinal cancer, which would you choose? We like to think you'd do everything possible to avoid the second set of health woes. Here's one way to do it, suggests new research: avoid extended use of proton-pump inhibitors, commonly taken in over-the-counter and prescription form to manage gastric acid-related issues such as heartburn.

More commonly known by their brand names, such as Nexium, Prilosec and Prevacid, proton-pump inhibitors are among the most widely used classes of drugs in the U.S. Long-term PPI use – even in low doses – is associated with an increased risk of death from heart disease, kidney disease or upper GI cancer, according to a study published in the *British Medical Journal*.

heartburn - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark The study compared PPIs with H2 blockers, another class of acid-suppressant drugs. While death rates from one of the above conditions were higher in the PPI group vs. the H2 group, it's important to note that H2 blockers weren't safe, either; just safer than PPIs. For example, fatality rates due to long-term PPI use were 387 per 1,000 people, compared with 342 per 1,000 people who used H2 blockers long-term. Not very encouraging if you're taking H2 blockers instead of PPIs.

The bottom line: When it comes to heartburn and stomach acid-related conditions, talk to your doctor about nondrug options first, and make sure if a medication is the only option, that he/she makes clear the length of use and what the next nondrug step should be if the condition persists.

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