



ppi panic

If you suffer from acid reflux, don't let sensational news stories scare you into throwing out your medication

BY DR. ART HISTER



This link is actually unsurprising since stomach acid is needed for the absorption and utilization of some nutrients (calcium, for example), and for fighting off some infections, but here's where you need that, perspective, m'dears.

First, PPIs are very effective and make life tolerable for millions of us — like me, as a shining example — who suffer from severe reflux symptoms and who, no matter how hard we do all the things we know we should

to go — whether by making lifestyle changes (losing weight, adjusting your diet) or by using weaker drugs (antacids or even weaker acid suppressors such as ranitidine, although the latter has also been linked to some of the same higher risks as PPIs but to a lesser degree) or by using herbs and acupuncture (as several viewers have written me, usually those from Hornby Island or Roberts Creek or New Denver, I think).

Yes, prevention always

Anyone at higher risk of complications likely has a lot more to gain than to lose from reducing acid output

do to counteract our reflux, still get severe recurrence of symptoms whenever we discontinue our PPI.

Second, chronic reflux has been linked to higher risks of several life-limiting complications including esophageal stricture (narrowing of the esophagus, which makes swallowing increasingly difficult) and cancer of the esophagus (which is terrifically hard to treat), so anyone at higher risk of such complications likely has a lot more to gain than to lose from reducing acid output.

Of course, if you can eliminate the use of strong meds, that's clearly the way

trumps treatment, and weak effective treatment always trumps stronger treatment. But if you can't get rid of your symptoms, don't be alarmed by provocative headlines: the vast majority of people who use PPIs will not suffer undue consequences.

As always, balance the risks against the benefits, and then decide for yourself where that balance lies.

And oh yes, dude, get rid of that Porsche, because as with hats, most men look really, really stupid in a Porsche. ■

Perspective, folks, always seek perspective. For example, if the headlines scare you into believing that the market is going to crash tomorrow and life won't be tolerable when you can't service your Porsche or Prius, just speak to someone who was alive in the Great Depression and then you'll have a better idea of what hardships you can really endure.

All of which is to say that you should reconsider

your decision if you're one of the millions on a stomach acid-suppressing drug called a proton pump inhibitor or PPI, such as Pariet, Losec, Prevacid and Nexium, and you've just thrown it out because of newspaper headlines. Some recent news stories claim that the risk of taking these drugs is "high" because studies found a link between the use of PPIs and certain fractures (the spine and wrist in post-menopausal women) and severe diarrheal infections from *Chlostridium difficile*.

Dr. Art Hister is a medical writer and health analyst for Global TV and Corus Radio.