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## Popular Drugs for Acid Reflux Put Your Brain in Danger

Millions of people today took a common medication that possibly moved them one big step closer to developing Alzheimer's disease.

Americans spend more than \$26 million a day on these drugs. That's more than a million dollars an hour, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The drugs are the antacid drugs known as **proton pump inhibitors (PPIs)** – marketed under brand names like Nexium, Prilosec and Prevacid. They quell heartburn by blocking an enzyme involved in the creation of stomach acid. And while they're doing that, they also trash your brain. . .

A German study just published in August found that elderly people who receive PPI medications are at greater risk of dementia. This was a large population study in which researchers followed 3,327 people age 75 or older for a period of six years. They identified 431 patients who developed dementia, including 260 who were diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

The scientists concluded, "Patients receiving PPI medication had a significantly increased risk of any dementia and Alzheimer's disease compared with nonusers." The study appeared in the *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*.

The German study doesn't look into the mechanism that causes this drug "side effect," but another recent study does exactly that.

When researchers examined the way PPIs work at the cellular and molecular level, they found the drugs not only block stomach acid (and thereby hamper the absorption of vitamins in the digestive tract ), they also block natural chemicals your body uses to protect your brain against Alzheimer's disease.

### **Your Brain has Its Own “Digestive” Function**

Nearly ten percent of the cells in your brain are immune cells called microglia. When damage to the brain occurs, the microglia mobilize and become amoeba-like, able to move to parts of the brain that are injured.

As mobile cells, the microglia transform into phagocytes. These are immune cells that can swallow up malfunctioning neurons and other debris, digesting and eliminating them. Microglia are the brain's janitors, sweeping up and disposing of the refuse.

The digestive process occurs in the microglia within structures called lysosomes. The lysosomes are like small vats of acid – the undesirable material is soaked in acid and dissolved.

As part of their cleanup duties, microglia remove and dissolve a substance known as fibrillar A-beta, a waste product that, if allowed to build up, is believed to initiate the destructive process that leads to Alzheimer's disease. If not checked, fibrillar A-beta can harm neurons, disrupt their connections, impair the brain's blood supply and lead to the formation of what is called amyloid plaque – a development considered a hallmark sign of Alzheimer's.

Unfortunately for people who take proton pump inhibitors, the microglia use proton pumps to pump protons into their lysosomes in order to maintain their digestive acidity – and this is the same type of proton pump that PPI drugs are designed to inhibit.

A study at the Shiraz University of Medical Sciences in Iran shows that proton pump inhibitors – which cross the blood-brain barrier into the brain – make these lysosomes less acidic and less able to dissolve fibrillar A-beta. They disable your microglia and damage your brain's ability to dispose of waste.

The researchers conclude: “Chronic consumption of PPIs (proton pump inhibitors) may thus be a risk factor for AD.”

## Gumming Up the Works

The bad brain news about these drugs doesn't stop there.

Tests at the Institute for Research in Biomedicine in Barcelona, Spain, demonstrate that proton pump inhibitors also seem to directly cause the accumulation of amyloid plaque in both test tubes and lab animals.

In their research, the Spanish researchers found these effects with the drug Prevacid. But they believe that other proton pump inhibitors may have similar effects.

I may as well add that PPIs are known to block the absorption of vitamin B12 – and it's well-established that low B12 is linked to memory loss and dementia. That's why we include B12 in one of our memory formulas, [Maximum Memory Support](#).

### PPI Drugs Increase the Risk of Death

Even aside from their potential effects on brain health, researchers are starting to uncover strong reasons to be much more judicious about our use of proton pump inhibitors.

A study at the University of Michigan Health System shows that patients who get these drugs while hospitalized are at a significantly increased risk of dying before their hospital stay is over. The researchers note that your stomach acid is a key element of the body's defenses against infections like pneumonia and Clostridium difficile, two illnesses that threaten many hospital patients.

The message of this research is clear: Proton pump inhibitors can have dangerous side effects. They should only be used with extreme care.

Best Regards,

Lee Euler  
Publisher

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