Drugs that suppress the production of stomach acid will moderately raise the odds of getting pneumonia, according to a new study conducted in The Netherlands and published in the October 27 issue of JAMA. Prescribed primarily for upset stomach and heartburn, these drugs are among the most widely advertised to doctors and the public; consequently, they are among the most commonly prescribed drugs in the country. Two different drug classes were described in this new study: the \textit{H2 receptor antagonists} (some brand names: Pepcid, Zantac, Enlon, Tagamet) and the \textit{proton pump inhibitors} (some brand names: Nexium, Prilosec, Losec, Prevacid).

The research team led by Robert J.F. Laheij, PhD, searched the medical records of half a million Dutch people to determine whether chronic use of drugs that suppress stomach acid is associated with the development of pneumonia. They matched the people who regularly took the drugs with those that did not. Compared to non-users, chronic users of stomach acid suppressive drugs showed an increase in the rate of pneumonia.

Based on their findings, the researchers estimate that for every 100 people who take one of these stomach-acid suppressive drugs every day for one year, there will be two additional cases of pneumonia. Or put another way: For every ten people who take the drug daily for ten years, there will be two additional cases of pneumonia. People at the high end of this risk were those who regularly took one of the proton pump inhibitors, especially at a higher than usual daily dose.

In a telephone interview, Dr. Laheij said that these findings actually understate the problems associated with acid-suppressive drugs. “We looked only at pneumonia, but in another study in which questionnaires were sent to 405 people, we found that there might also be an increase in influenza, the common cold and other respiratory infections among people taking acid-suppressive drugs.”

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