

Zantac has been recalled. What should you take instead?

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Throw out your Zantac or return it for a refund. Many stores will take back semi-used packages of these pills.

Last month, Zantac was recalled from all shelves. This is due to low levels of a cancer-causing contaminant. Many questions about this contaminant are still unanswered, so it is unclear when if at all Zantac will be back on the market.

Until then, you may want to switch to other heartburn drugs. However, we advise against taking Prilosec, Nexium or Prevacid for an extended period of time. See link from the International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders. These drugs, known as proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) are most commonly prescribed for the treatment of heartburn and acid-related disorders and are not indicated for long-term use.

Here's why.

First, it's generally not a good idea to take any drug for an extended period that is not designed for long-term use. For example, we've cautioned before that long-term use of over-the-counter sleep aids increase risk of dementia.

Second, this is specifically the case with the drugs you are most likely to switch to – Prilosec, Nexium or Prevacid. In the August and September Well Aware newsletters, we featured a two-part series recommending many other solutions, both to avoid heartburn and to treat it.

We encourage you to read those articles, and make them available to your employees so that they may switch to something other than those three drugs. Suspected adverse effects from long-term use include:

- Vitamin B12, magnesium, and calcium deficiency
- Diarrhea caused by a pesky bacterium
- Thinning bones and fractures (osteoporosis risk)
- Kidney problems
- Heart attacks

It has probably been wishful thinking that the long-term use of PPIs was perfectly safe. Like most medications, there are side-effects and complications.

Common sense tells us that if you don't need to take one of these powerful stomach acid suppressants (Prilosec, Nexium or Prevacid), *talk to your doctor* about stopping it. There are many safe and effective alternatives available over-the-counter. Ask your doctor if Tums, Tagamet or Pepcid (first generation drugs that suppress acid only around the meal that is triggering your indigestion) could work for you.

However, most people who need to take a PPI should be able to safely continue to do so, for up to 8 weeks at a time followed by several months off, as the directions indicate, without the fear of serious complications. Again, talk to your doctor about what's right for you.

Meanwhile Quizzify is offering an extra bonus quiz on indigestion (including some review questions, and questions on how pills work in general) [that you can take right here without even signing in.](#) As a bonus quiz, this is informational and does not count towards your Quizzify total.

