

Medicines to reduce stomach acid (Proton Pump Inhibitors)

What are PPIs?

PPIs are usually capsules or tablets. Examples include: omeprazole (Losec), lansoprazole (Zoton), rabeprazole (Pariet), esomeprazole (Nexium) and pantoprazole (Protium). They reduce the amount of acid made by the stomach. PPIs can be used to reduce the risk of patients taking long term anti-inflammatory pain killers (known as NSAIDs) developing stomach ulcers. Examples of these pain killers include: ibuprofen (Nurofen), diclofenac (Voltarol), naproxen and indomethacin amongst others.

Do you need to continue taking your PPI after surgery?

After your surgery you may find that the requirement for your anti-inflammatory medication will cease or reduce. If this is the case then you may no longer require to take your PPI.

Why does the stomach need acid?

Stomach acid is needed for food to be digested and to kill any bacteria in food.

What happens if a PPI is taken for longer than two months?

Taking a PPI for a long duration of time (e.g. greater than two months) increases your risk of getting the infection *Clostridium difficile* (sometimes referred to as *C diff*). It is thought this is because the reduced level of acid in the stomach caused by the PPI makes bacteria more likely to survive. Long-term use of PPIs has also been linked with an increased risk of osteoporosis and bone fractures, increased risk of pneumonia, and interference with vitamin B₁₂ absorption.

What happens when a PPI is stopped?

PPIs must be stopped gradually to allow the stomach to re-adjust its acid production. If they are stopped too quickly, you may get symptoms related to over-production of acid.

How should a PPI be stopped?

Your GP will advise you how your PPI should be stopped. This is likely to be in 4 stages:

1. If you are on a high dose (more than 20mg) you will reduce to a lower dose for one month. This will be reduced again until you are taking the lowest dose of your PPI.
2. You should then take the low dose PPI on alternate days for one month. If you have any indigestion or heartburn on the non-medicine days, your GP will give you Peptac. Peptac is an antacid: it neutralises the acid but doesn't interfere with acid production.
3. You should then reduce the dose again to take the PPI once or twice a week for one month, again using Peptac if needed.
4. Finally, you should stop the PPI. Any symptoms of indigestion or heartburn should clear up within two weeks of stopping the PPI as the level of stomach acid returns to normal. If you still have symptoms after three weeks, consult your doctor.

What else should I do to avoid indigestion and heartburn?

Indigestion and heartburn are reduced by: stopping smoking, eating in moderation, avoiding rich and fatty foods, cutting down on alcohol and caffeine, and avoiding being overweight. Using an extra pillow at night can relieve symptoms.