

Why should I think about stopping or 'stepping down' my PPI?

There is a balance between the benefit that you get from any medicine and the risk of side effects.

Most ulcers or inflamed tissues in the stomach are healed within 8 weeks of starting a PPI. Nobody knows exactly the long-term effects of PPIs, but there is some emerging evidence that taking PPIs long-term may cause problems for some people.

It has been suggested that reducing acid in the stomach could increase bacterial growth leading to an infection called *Clostridium Difficile* which can cause very severe diarrhoea. If you develop this symptom you must consult your doctor.

There is also a suggestion that PPIs used long-term may increase the risk of bone fractures and decrease levels of certain vitamins and minerals that the body needs to remain healthy such as vitamin B12 and magnesium.

For this reason it is advised that where possible PPIs are used at the lowest dose and for the shortest time possible. In some situations however, it is important to continue to take a PPI, e.g. conditions such as Barrett's oesophagus or to protect your stomach from the irritant effects of another of your medications.

How can I avoid indigestion and heartburn?

- Don't smoke.
- Try to keep to a healthy weight.
- Reduce your intake of alcohol, tea, coffee, chocolate and fatty foods.
- Avoid other foods which give you symptoms such as spicy foods, and acidic drinks such as fresh orange and cola.
- Eat at regular times, avoiding large or late meals.
- Avoid anti-inflammatory painkillers (ask your pharmacist or doctor which painkillers are safe to take).
- Reduce stress - include some physical activity or relaxation every day.
- Avoid tight belts or clothing.
- Avoid bending down or lying flat after meals.

Additional advice for people with reflux symptoms on lying down:

- Raise the head of your bed by 10-15cm (4-6 inches) using blocks under the legs of your bed, or use a wedge shaped pillow to raise your head.
- Eat your evening meal 3-4 hours before going to bed.

It is important to remember that medication can help control symptoms but it is also important to follow lifestyle advice to help reduce symptoms



Barnsley

Clinical Commissioning Group

Proton Pump Inhibitors

(Omeprazole, Lansoprazole, Pantoprazole, Rabeprazole, Esomeprazole)

Information for patients about treatment of heartburn and indigestion (dyspepsia)

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Introduction

Your stomach needs acid to help digest food, but in some people the acid can cause:

Indigestion (or dyspepsia) is described as pain or discomfort in the stomach or upper abdomen.

Heartburn (or acid reflux) is described as a burning sensation that rises from the upper abdomen or in the chest behind the breastbone towards the neck/throat.

What are Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs)?

PPIs reduce the amount of acid in your stomach and this can help to relieve the symptoms of indigestion and heartburn. This reduction in acid also allows your body to heal any inflammation or ulcers that might have developed, usually within 4-8 weeks of starting treatment. The manufacturers of these medicines recommend them for short-term use for most patients.

Examples of PPIs are:

- Omeprazole
- Lansoprazole
- Pantoprazole
- Rabeprazole
- Esomeprazole

Starting your medication

For many people, only a short course of treatment is required.

To start with you may be given a prescription for 4 weeks. If your symptoms continue you may be prescribed another 4 weeks of treatment.

After this time many people find their symptoms are better. However it is common for these symptoms to come back again, maybe several months later.

Long-term management and 'step down'

After you have finished your course of PPI treatment, you may have your treatment 'stepped down' to one of the following options:

- **Reduce dose** -The dose of your PPI may be reduced to a lower dose to keep you symptom free.
- **Take PPI only when needed** - You may be advised to take your PPI only when you have symptoms of heartburn or indigestion. When the symptoms are relieved (often after only a few days) you stop taking the PPI again.
- **Stop PPI** - You may be prescribed an antacid and/or alginate such as Peptac® to use when you experience symptoms. If this fails to help, your doctor may prescribe another short course of a PPI or another medicine.

Rebound symptoms

During 'step down' you may find that your symptoms return.

If you take a PPI for more than a few weeks, your stomach can increase its ability to make acid. This means that when the PPI is stopped, acid levels can be higher than before you started taking them and you may find that your symptoms are actually worse than before.

These so-called rebound symptoms are not uncommon, but will usually only last for a few weeks. During this time it can be helpful to ask your pharmacist or doctor for an antacid to relieve indigestion or an alginate such as Peptac® to relieve heartburn.

Alginates work by forming a physical barrier at the top of the stomach that can stop acid getting back out into the oesophagus where it causes pain.

