

Improper use of OTC dyspepsia drugs likely

Knowledge about the proper use of dyspepsia drugs was poor and it is likely that patients with dyspepsia inappropriately self-medicate with over-the-counter (OTC) antacids, reveal the findings of a survey conducted in Finland. The survey was conducted during March 1995 at 10 pharmacies in that country and was given to people buying OTC antacids, alginates or sucralfate.

292 returned questionnaires were evaluable; most of the participants bought only antacids or alginates (n = 218). The most frequently mentioned symptoms for which the OTC drugs had been bought were heartburn, acid regurgitation, occasional abdominal pain and gas; 11% of respondents reported at least 1 symptom that contraindicated self-medication.

More information needed

Patients were also asked how long they thought OTC drugs can be used for continuously without a break to treat GI symptoms; only 7% knew the correct answer (4–8 weeks). 34% of the respondents had used OTC dyspepsia drugs for several years and the longest reported time was 50 years. 72 respondents had bought sucralfate, but the survey revealed that regular and adequate dosing of the drug was uncommon.

The survey results indicate that affected patients need more information about dyspepsia and its proper treatment. Physicians should be aware of their patients' self-medication habits and should not rely too much on the assumption that advice is given by pharmacists or in package inserts, conclude the survey researchers.

Sihvo S, Hemminki E. Self-medication of dyspepsia: how appropriate is it?
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