

Propoxyphene Withdrawn from the Market

You may have heard the news that medicines containing propoxyphene (*Darvon*, *Darvocet-N 100*, etc) can cause heart problems, and will no longer be available.

Propoxyphene is an old drug. It's been on the market for over 50 years. But propoxyphene was approved before the FDA required drug manufacturers to test how drugs affect the heart.

A new study looking at the effects of propoxyphene on the heart shows that it can increase the risk for cardiac arrhythmias, or irregular heartbeat. Irregular heartbeat can be very serious. For this reason, FDA has decided that the risks of using propoxyphene outweigh its benefits and that it should no longer be sold in the U.S. Below are answers to your questions about this new development with propoxyphene.

What is propoxyphene?

Propoxyphene is used to treat mild to moderate pain. It belongs to a class of drugs called opioids, and is related to other pain meds such as hydrocodone (*Lortab*, etc) and codeine (*Tylenol with Codeine*, etc). However, propoxyphene only works about as well as acetaminophen (*Tylenol*).

Propoxyphene has been available as a single drug (*Darvon*, etc). It has also been available in combination with acetaminophen (*Darvocet-N 100*, etc) and in combination with aspirin and caffeine (*Darvon Compound*).

Could propoxyphene cause me to have an irregular heartbeat?

There is no way to tell who might develop an irregular heartbeat with propoxyphene. Irregular heartbeat with propoxyphene can happen at any time, in any person, even in those who have been taking propoxyphene for many years. Irregular heartbeat can occur in individuals taking normal doses of propoxyphene, and in individuals with a healthy heart. The risk of irregular heartbeat goes away when you stop taking propoxyphene.

People with kidney problems might be at higher risk, because they may not clear propoxyphene from the body as well as those with healthy kidneys. People who take medicines that slow the breakdown of propoxyphene or affect the heart in a similar way as propoxyphene might also be at higher risk.

Should I stop taking propoxyphene?

Contact your healthcare provider as soon as possible to get switched to another pain medicine. If you take propoxyphene regularly every day, don't stop taking it without talking to your healthcare provider first. Stopping regular use of propoxyphene all at once might cause you to have withdrawal symptoms such as anxiety, diarrhea, nausea, and shaking.

Are there options available besides propoxyphene for treating my pain?

There are several types of pain medicines other than propoxyphene that your healthcare provider can recommend or prescribe for you. For example, your provider might tell you to use acetaminophen, or an NSAID such as ibuprofen (*Motrin*, etc) or naproxen. Or, he or she might prescribe a drug with an opioid such as codeine, hydrocodone, etc.

There are plenty of effective and safe pain medicines available. Your healthcare provider can recommend or prescribe one that is best for you.

What should I do with unused propoxyphene products?

If your community doesn't offer drug disposal or drug take-back programs, dispose of the medicine in a way that keeps it out of reach of kids and pets. Take the medicine out of its container, and mix it with something like used coffee grounds or kitty litter, to make it undesirable. Place this mixture in a sealable container such as a freezer bag, empty margarine tub, etc before you place it in the trash.

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