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Take a Hike

Want to reduce your risk of developing vascular dementia? Go take a hike. If you want to stay a bit closer to home, try increasing your physical activity by walking more, gardening or climbing stairs.

Vascular dementia occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is interrupted. Lack of blood flow results in damage or death of the affected brain cells. An Italian study of 749 seniors showed that those with the highest level of physical activity were 27% less likely to develop vascular dementia compared to those with the lowest level. Unfortunately, there was no correlation between exercise and the development of Alzheimer's Disease.

Sweet Olanzapine

In the United States, drug companies are often the targets of class action suits because of their wealth and the potential for medications to cause adverse effects. Eli Lilly, the manufacturers of Zyprexa® (olanzapine), were the victims of such a suit recently.

Olanzapine can cause weight gain, increased blood sugar, and diabetes. In the suit, several patients from Alaska claimed that the company did not do an adequate job of warning them about these potential side effects.

Any of the atypical antipsychotics (Risperdal®, Seroquel® and Zyprexa®) used in Canada have the potential to increase blood sugar. Zyprexa® is the worst offender; therefore one of the other agents should be chosen if hyperglycemia, weight gain, or diminished control of preexisting diabetes is seen.

Methotrexate Warning

Methotrexate is used to treat a wide variety of conditions. These include different forms of cancer, rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis, among others. Roughly three years ago, ISMP warned us of dosing errors which had tragic and near tragic outcomes.

Some recent deaths and near misses have resulted in another warning. Volume 8, Issue 2 of the *ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin* states "methotrexate has been inadvertently prescribed, dispensed, or administered on a daily basis, instead of the intended weekly basis, resulting in death".

Methotrexate can have devastating effects on the liver, kidneys, and bone marrow. In

almost all cases, the drug should be dosed once weekly. For some individuals the total dose may be divided into two or three portions. This dose can be spread out over a period of 24 hours to improve tolerability. Any other dosage regimen should be questioned with the physician.

Oral Fleet Not So Neat

Oral Fleet® Phospho-soda is often given to patients before colonoscopy or other bowel examination procedures. It is very effective and requires the consumption of only a small volume of liquid.

The active ingredient in Oral Fleet® is sodium phosphate. This drug, which is also found in Fleet® Enema, is not to be used in individuals with renal impairment. These people are unable to clear the excess phosphate from their system, and a dangerous electrolyte imbalance may develop. Sodium phosphate can also cause direct calcification of renal tissue in those at risk.

A recent study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* has shown that Oral® Fleet may cause permanent damage in the elderly, even if kidney function is normal. PEG based products (e.g. PEG Lyte® and Co-lyte®) are preferred. Pico-Salax® may also be suitable if kidney function is intact.

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