

 By Andrew Hough  
Published: 7:30AM GMT 19 Feb 2010

GlaxoSmithKline, the British pharmaceuticals giant, announced on Thursday that it was removing zinc from its denture adhesives after claims that long-term, excessive use of the products was bad for people's health.

It has been claimed that long-term use of popular brands such as Poligrip Ultra and Poligrip Total Care has been linked to neurological damage.

NHS dentistry shake-up fails as one million fewer get treatment

It comes as hundreds of lawsuits in America are poised to go to trial, alleging Poligrip caused nerve damage, leading to a loss of balance, loss of sensation in the hands and feet, and leaving some patients paralysed.

The company, which said it was a precautionary and voluntary decision, said the products were safe when used as directed.

It warned that some people used extra cream to correct ill-fitting dentures and urged customers who have done so to seek medical advice.

For example, a 40g tube of the adhesive should last up to six weeks, but because of their ill fitting dentures applied it more regularly.

Zinc only enters the body when swallowed and is not absorbed in the mouth.

The company, which is reformulating all of its adhesive products to be zinc-free which will be clearly labelled on packaging sold about £336m (\$US525m) worth of denture adhesive products last year.

When asked if Glaxo's move was a response to that litigation, Jo Revill, a company spokeswoman replied: "We're doing this as a precautionary measure to minimise the risk to consumers."

Earlier in a statement, Dr Howard Marsh, chief medical officer of GSK Consumer Healthcare, said the company last year received an increased number of adverse event reports.

It is important for consumers to know that Poligrip Ultra and Poligrip Total Care remain safe to use as directed on the product label, he said.

We are taking this voluntary action because we have become aware of potential health problems associated with the long-term excessive use of our zinc-containing denture adhesive products.

These reports are very rare, given that several million people worldwide are users of the products.

He added: "If anyone is concerned that they may have been using the product in excess they should stop using it, talk to their doctor and switch to a zinc-free alternative."

The company added: "Together with published literature, these suggest that excessive use of these products, typically for several years, may lead to the development of high levels of zinc in the body which are associated with neurological symptoms such as numbness, tingling or weakness in the arms and legs, difficulties with walking and balance and blood problems such as anaemia."

Procter & Gamble said it does not plan any changes to the formula for Fixodent, a competing adhesive.

"The levels of zinc in Fixodent are half that used in Super Poligrip," said company spokeswoman Michelle Vaeth.

Fixodent formulations have been safely marketed for 20 years.

Ms Vaeth said the amount of zinc a consumer would ingest from normal daily use of Fixodent is less than the amount of zinc in most daily multivitamins and comparable to the zinc in six ounces of ground beef.

Researchers at the University of Texas first raised the possibility of a link between denture cream and nerve damage two years ago.

GSK shares closed down 1p to £12.43 in London.

Source: <a

href="http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/pharmaceuticalsandchemicals/7267505/Poligrip-denture-zinc-ingredients-to-be-removed-amid-health-fears-for-pensioners.html">http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/pharmaceuticalsandchemicals/7267505/Poligrip-denture-zinc-ingredients-to-be-removed-amid-health-fears-for-pensioners.html</a></p>