Heartburn drugs Prilosec, Nexium block benefits of blood thinner Plavix warns FDA

USA — A popular variety of heartburn medications can interfere with the blood thinner Plavix, a drug taken by millions of Americans to reduce risks of heart attack and stroke, Federal health officials said.

The Food and Drug Administration said the stomach-soothing drugs Prilosec and Nexium cut in half the blood-thinning effect of Plavix, known generically as clopidogrel.

But patients who need to reduce their acid should take drugs from the H-2 blocker family, which includes Johnson & Johnson’s Mylanta and Boehringer Ingelheim’s Zantac. FDA scientists say there is no evidence those drugs interfere with Plavix’s anti-blood clotting action.

Nexium and Prilosec are part of a class of drugs known as proton pump inhibitors, but FDA regulators said they don’t have enough information to say whether other drugs in that class shouldn’t be used with Plavix.

The FDA said the warnings on Plavix have been strengthened based on a 150-patient study submitted by Sanofi over the summer.

But some consumer advocates said the agency’s action fell short, arguing that regulators should have placed the information in a “black box” warning label, the most serious available.

“This information still has not risen to as prominent a level of warning as it should have,” said Dr. Sidney Wolfe, director of health research at the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen.

“Going forward, patients using Plavix with Nexium significantly increased patients’ chances of being hospitalized for a heart attack, stroke or chest pain.”

WBB Securities analyst Steven Brozak said the news would put pressure on Paris-based Sanofi and New York-based Bristol-Myers to provide more safety data on their best-selling products.

“This is going to create a chain reaction as patients start calling their physicians, and they are forced to make a spot decision on limited information,” said Brozak. “That’s not gonna help either company’s bottom line.”