Type 2 Diabetes Drug Actos and Its Risks

When it reached the U.S. market in 1999, Actos was celebrated for its ability to help type 2 diabetes patients deal with their condition. Since, doctors worldwide have prescribed the drug to more than 10 million people.

Today, however, most discussion about Actos are focused not as much on how the drug helps diabetics live with their condition but on the dangerous Actos side effects— including heart failure, bladder cancer and broken bones.

The U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has become increasingly wary of Actos as more and more studies reveal it has a host of serious, even deadly, side effects.

France and Germany banned the drug after results from a 2009 study by the French Medicines Agency confirmed its link to bladder cancer.

The FDA added its black-box warning to Actos, which is the most serious label the drug regulator can give. Since that label warning, though, the FDA has done nothing regarding the drug. It is waiting for full results of a 10-year clinical trial of Actos. Those results won't be available until 2013.

The first results from the study showed patients 40 percent more likely to develop Actos bladder cancer after they take the drug for more than 12 months.

Additional Risks of Actos

Unfortunately, bladder cancer isn’t the only negative side effect of taking Actos. Studies have found that the diabetes drug also increases the risk of heart failure and heart attacks for people who are Actos more than a few months. Some examples of the risk factors are:

• In 2008, a medical study by the Wake Forest University School of Medicine found Actos weakens bones, more than doubling the risk of bone fractures for post-menopausal women.
• Actos was also shown to cause an eye disorder known as macular edema, in a 2009 study by the California Permanente Medical Group. This eye disorder can cause impaired vision and even blindness.
• Rare cases of liver failure have even been reported.

Actos is still on the shelves in the United States, and some drug companies are hoping to make their own generic versions of it when the patent expires in August 2012.

While the FDA awaits final results of the 10-year study, as many as 10,000 patients have decided to sue Takeda Pharmaceuticals, the manufacturer of Actos. Many of them say they never would have taken Actos if they had known the risks involved.

It’s always a good idea for patients to talk to their doctor and pharmacist about the possible side effects of their medication. In addition, the Internet provides a wealth of information and can help consumers stay informed.