


[About Dr. David](#)
[Ask Dr. David](#)
[Media & Lectures](#)
[Books & Publications](#)
[Dr. David Radio Show](#)

## QUICK LINKS

- [Dr. David Radio Show](#)
- [Ask Dr. David](#)
- [Who is Dr. David?](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Upcoming Events](#)
- [Be a Community Partner!](#)

## NEWSLETTER

Sign up today for our **FREE** Dr. David Newsletter delivered quarterly straight to your mailbox!

[Sign Up Now!](#)

[Click here](#) to find local stations that carry the radio show.

Please feel free to [contact us](#) with any questions!

## The Column

### LIFELONG HEALTH

When I first began teaching medicine, I always tried to ingrain my students with this simple mantra: "Show me the data." As educated consumers of healthcare, we must all adopt this philosophy I am constantly searching out information about new medications, therapies, and practices to treat many types of conditions. Wading through studies and reports always presents with new statistics and data. Recently a 40% increased risk of heart attacks and heart failure was reported in diabetics prescribed the medication Avandia. A 40% increase - wow and even worse the media is letting use know that Glaxo Smith Kline knew of this danger for a number of years choosing to downplay or ignore it. In a research study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, researchers from the Cleveland clinic reanalyzed 43 research studies that compared the effectiveness of Avandia to other drugs used to treat diabetes. A total of 15,500 diabetics received Avandia compared to 12,500 who received another drug. There were 86 heart attacks and 39 deaths from heart disease in the diabetics taking Avandia and 72 heart attacks and 22 deaths in those taking some other drugs, a 40% increase in risk in those taking Avandia

On the surface the increased risk seems enormous but when the information is examined in greater depth, interpretation becomes murkier. The 40% increase in risk equates to about 1 extra heart problem in every 1000 patients taking Avandia a miniscule increase. Both the American Diabetic Association and the Food and Drug Administration advises caution and comments that while some studies show an increased risk of heart disease with Avandia others show the exact opposite. Editorials published in numerous prestigious journals, including the Lancet warn physicians not to panic and emphasize that further research is needed before a definitive answer can be obtained as to whether the risk of heart disease is sufficient reason to discontinue Avandia in a patient who is doing well and whose diabetes is appropriately controlled. The message is don't panic and what ever you do don't stop taking the drug without extensive discussion with your physician.

Although Avandia has been available for over 8 years it is a relatively new medication compared to those that have been used to treat diabetes for 30 years or more. At the moment over 2 million diabetics take Avandia generating over \$3 billion in sales for Glaxo Smith Kline. The reason is clear. Avandia is a novel drug that attacks the central problem in adult onset or type 2 diabetes - insulin resistance. Most diabetics are overweight and as a consequence insulin becomes less effective in clearing glucose from the blood, leading to a higher blood glucose level. Avandia attacks this problem and makes it much easier to maintain a normal blood sugar.

Although a good drug, Avandia does have significant side effects. While risk of a heart attack and heart failure is garnering much attention Avandia also increases osteoporosis and causes a 3-600 percent increased risk of fractures. This poses a much greater danger to women than does a risk of heart problems. In older persons falls and fractures can be debilitating and life threatening. Furthermore the drug is much more expensive than the well known older medications.

The biggest problem with Avandia or any new medication relates to the fact that most physicians readily abandon the tried and true older medication for the new. This is based on the hype and aggressive marketing that comes with the entry of a new medication onto the market. Because it is new it must be better - not necessarily so. The best approach to managing any chronic disease, including diabetes is to truly study the illness, the treatment options and what state of the art care should entail. Become an empowered and knowledgeable patient.

For most uncomplicated diabetics initial approaches should be to control or return blood sugar to normal by diet and exercise. Nutritional counseling is very effective and a determined

patient with will power may never require medications. If therapy is needed always start treatment with a generic drug. The two most common are metformin and glyburide. The cost is small and results excellent. Only if this fails should alternative more expensive medication be considered. Once this point is reached a newer drug should be considered. Remember the key to managing diabetes is to maintain a normal blood sugar and if this requires a drug that comes with a price, be it cost or potential side effects, so be it.

©2008 DrDavidHealth.com. All Rights Reserved. | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Home](#)

designed & powered by  **FLEX360**