



Drug FAQs for members

FAQs = Frequently Asked Questions

COX-2 Inhibitors: celecoxib (Celebrex™) and rofecoxib (Vioxx®)

1. ***I have seen advertisements for Vioxx® and Celebrex™. What can you tell me about these drugs?***
 - Vioxx® and Celebrex™ are used to relieve some symptoms caused by arthritis, such as inflammation, swelling, stiffness, and pain in the joints. Vioxx® is also used to treat the short-term pain after dental or surgical procedures and menstrual pain. These medicines are available only with your doctor's prescription.
 - Vioxx® and Celebrex™ belong to a class of drugs called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Vioxx® and Celebrex™ are sometimes referred to as COX-2 inhibitors, because of the way they work. These two NSAIDs work by a slightly different mechanism than the traditional NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen (Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®).
2. ***Are Vioxx® and Celebrex™ on the Kaiser Permanente Formulary?***
 - Currently, Vioxx® and Celebrex™ are not on the Kaiser Permanente Formulary.
3. ***Do Vioxx® and Celebrex™ work better than the traditional NSAIDs?***
 - No. There is no evidence to suggest that these newer medications work better than the traditional NSAIDs at relieving pain and inflammation. In medical studies, both Vioxx® and Celebrex™ have been compared to various NSAIDs (for example, ibuprofen, naproxen, diclofenac) and found to be equal in relieving pain and inflammation.
4. ***Are there benefits to using Vioxx® and Celebrex™?***
 - All NSAIDs, including Vioxx® and Celebrex™ can cause gastrointestinal (GI) side effects (side effects involving the stomach or intestine). Gastrointestinal side effects can be grouped into two categories: 1) dyspepsia (including abdominal pain, upset stomach, heartburn, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea); and 2) serious GI toxicity (including gastric bleeding, ulcers, and/or perforations).
 - In the majority of individuals, the risk of developing serious GI toxicity is low (<1% or less than 1 in 100 persons) when taking a traditional NSAID for one year.
 - Individuals at a higher risk for a GI bleed include those who have had a GI bleed in the past and those over the age of 75.
 - Other risk factors include the type of arthritis you have, if you are taking oral corticosteroids (i.e. prednisone), and a poor overall health status.
 - Preliminary evidence suggests that Vioxx® and Celebrex™ may have a lower incidence of serious GI toxicity than some of the traditional NSAIDs. Therefore, in those patients who have risk factors for serious GI toxicity, Vioxx® and Celebrex™ may be of benefit.
5. ***I get an upset stomach (dyspepsia) when I take other NSAIDs. Are Vioxx® and Celebrex™ better for me?***
 - The manufacturers for both Vioxx® and Celebrex™ claim that their drugs are better “tolerated” than the traditional NSAIDs, however, there is little evidence to support this claim.
 - In a large medical study comparing Vioxx® to several other NSAIDs, the overall rate of dyspepsia was 23.5% with Vioxx® versus 25.5% with the traditional NSAIDs.

6. Are Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™] better for people who have kidney or liver disease?

- There is no evidence that these newer NSAIDs are any safer for the kidneys or the liver. In fact, both Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™] should not be used in people with severe kidney or liver diseases without close monitoring by their doctors.

7. I have high blood pressure, can I still take Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™]?

- All of the NSAIDs, including Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™], can cause increases in blood pressure (hypertension). The product labeling (package insert) states that high blood pressure occurred in 3.5% of patients taking Vioxx[®] and in approximately 2% of patients taking Celebrex[™].
- Patients who already have high blood pressure may be more likely to develop hypertension when started on NSAIDs. Preliminary results from a medical study in elderly (> 65 years of age) patients with hypertension found that increases in systolic blood pressure (the higher number in a blood pressure reading) occurred in 12% of Vioxx[®] patients and 7% of Celebrex[™] patients.
- More studies are needed to determine whether the difference between Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™] in elderly hypertensive patients, is significant.

8. What are the common side effects of Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™]?

- As with all NSAIDs, the most common side effects associated with the use of Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™] involve the GI tract and include indigestion, diarrhea, constipation, gas and abdominal pain. Serious GI toxicity (gastric bleeding, gastric ulcers, and/or perforations) has also been reported in patients taking these drugs.

9. Who should not take Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™]?

- You should not take Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™] if you have ever had an allergic reaction, such as asthma attacks, swelling of the face and throat, or hives when taking aspirin or other NSAIDs (for example, ibuprofen and naproxen).
- You should not take Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™] in late pregnancy because they may harm the fetus.
- Furthermore, you should not take Celebrex[™] if you have allergies to sulfa drugs (sulfonamides).

10. Can I take Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[™] if I am taking other medications?

- If you take Vioxx[®] or Celebrex[®] with certain medications, they may interact with each other and affect the way the drugs work. Tell your doctor about all the medications that you are taking, including over-the-counter medications. Your doctor may want to check to make sure that all of the medications are working properly when taken with Vioxx[®] and Celebrex[®]. For example, people who are on a blood thinner, such as warfarin, should be monitored closely to see if any adjustment of the warfarin dose is needed.
- Other drugs that may need close monitoring include:
 - Methotrexate (Rheumatrex[®])
 - Fluconazole (Diflucan[®])
 - Lithium (Lithobid[®])
 - Rifampin (Rifadin[®])
 - Diuretics (water pills such as Lasix[®] or Bumex[®])
 - Prednisone (Deltasone[®]) and cortisone (Cortone[®]).