

GlaxoSmithKline to stop manufacturing denture creams that contain zinc

By JAN JARVIS

jjarvis@star-telegram.com

The maker of a popular denture adhesive said Thursday that it will stop making the product and reformulate it to remove zinc, which has been linked to neurological problems.

GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare decided to voluntarily take the action after becoming aware of potential health problems associated with long-term and excessive use of denture adhesives containing zinc. The company said in a statement that the products -- Super Poligrip Original, Ultra Fresh and Extra Care -- remain safe to use as directed on the label.

The adhesive will be replaced with a zinc-free version.

The announcement surprised Elizabeth Gilley, who recently filed a lawsuit against GlaxoSmithKline, which makes the adhesive that she started using at age 15. The 26-year-old Mineral Wells woman, who developed neurological problems after using the denture cream, was featured in a Star-Telegram article this month.

Researchers at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center also published a study linking zinc in adhesives to neurological disorders.

Gilley is among a growing number of denture wearers who have filed lawsuits against the adhesive manufacturers. At least 20 mass tort claims have been filed in Philadelphia, where GlaxoSmithKline is located. About 70 lawsuits have been filed in Miami against GlaxoSmithKline and Procter & Gamble.

By telling her story, Gilley said, she hoped to educate others about the dangers of using excessive amounts of denture creams containing zinc. Several years after she began using the adhesive, her legs became numb and she had difficulty walking. Today she is disabled and uses a walker. Gilley said she hopes that others don't have to go through what she has endured.

"I think I made a difference," she said. "If it's not on the market, nobody gets hurt."

GlaxoSmithKline has added the potentially hazardous material to its adhesive for decades, despite evidence that consuming large amounts of zinc over an extended period can cause serious neurological damage, said Houston lawyer Ed Blizzard, who represented Gilley in the lawsuit.

"Today's announcement is a responsible action for GSK to take and a victory for consumers," he said. "Unfortunately, it comes far too late for the hundreds, if not thousands, of people who have been crippled by zinc."

GlaxoSmithKline said it will transition to zinc-free versions of its adhesives. "Zinc-Free" will be clearly printed on the packaging.