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Aspirin May Lower Risk of Hodgkin's

Study Suggests Regular Aspirin Use May Lower the Risk of Hodgkin's Disease

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON Feb. 18 — Scientists have found a hint that regular aspirin use might lower the risk of Hodgkin's disease, but more research is needed to prove it.

Even if the link is real, Hodgkin's is too rare a cancer to recommend aspirin as a preventive, scientists caution, since the pills can have side effects. Instead, the research may point toward better understanding of how this cancer forms, important for future work on treatments.

Millions of Americans already take low-dose aspirin to help prevent heart attacks, and studies suggest it also may modestly lower the risk of a few cancers, most notably colon cancer.

Scientists at the Harvard School of Public Health uncovered aspirin's possible connection with Hodgkin's a lymph system cancer diagnosed in 7,600 Americans a year while studying what role a certain virus plays in the malignancy.

To hunt risk factors, they matched 565 Hodgkin's patients with people of similar age and demographics who didn't have the cancer.

Those who regularly used aspirin the equivalent of two or more regular-strength tablets a week for five years had a 40 percent lower risk of Hodgkin's, researchers reported Tuesday in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Hodgkin's disease is linked to inflammation. Aspirin not only calms inflammation, but it is thought to inactivate a protein, called a transcription factor, important for Hodgkin's cells to survive, said epidemiologist Ellen Chang, the study's lead author.

Other painkillers don't affect that protein, and the study found no benefit from other anti-inflammatory painkillers, such as ibuprofen.

However, acetaminophen is a different type of painkiller, and the study found risk of Hodgkin's was 70 percent higher among regular acetaminophen users.

The researchers caution people not to be frightened by the acetaminophen finding, because they are suspicious that it could be wrong. The Hodgkin's patients may have used acetaminophen because of early symptoms of their cancer, thus confusing the research, Chang said.

"There's no clear biologic reason why acetaminophen would be associated with higher Hodgkin's disease risk," said Chang, now with Sweden's Karolinska Institute.

But "it makes sense that aspirin could be associated with lower Hodgkin's risk" because aspirin has the

unique transcription-factor inactivation, she said.

The study raises an interesting hypothesis about aspirin, but just how strong a role the transcription factor plays is contentious, said Dr. Ernest Hawk of the National Cancer Institute.

"Even if it is confirmed, these results do not mean that anybody should take aspirin to prevent cancer," said American Cancer Society epidemiologist Eric Jacobs. Aspirin can have serious side effects in some patients, including bleeding and digestive ulcers.

Both cancer specialists minimized the acetaminophen finding.

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