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MEDIA RELEASE

Aspirin Does Not Have To Put The Health Of Your Eyes At Risk

People who have been prescribed aspirin to prevent heart attack and stroke may be wondering whether to continue taking it, in the wake of recent media reports linking regular aspirin intake with an increased risk of neovascular age-related macular degeneration (AMD) – a disease that is a leading cause of blindness in older people.

As noted by the authors of the study, the decision about whether to continue or stop is complex, and needs to be individualised.

The good news is that another option exists. “People who are worried about these findings should consider seeing a qualified western herbalist or naturopath, as they can prescribe herbs that support the blood vessels while the aspirin’s blood-thinning effect takes place,” advises Dr Sandi Rogers, ED.D., N.D., president of the Australian Traditional-Medicine Society (ATMS), and a qualified naturopath and massage therapist with three decades of clinical experience.

Hawthorn for Blood Vessel Integrity

Dr Rogers uses the herb hawthorn (*Crataegus oxyacantha*) to maintain blood-vessel integrity. “One of the side effects of aspirin is that it *may* weaken the blood vessels,” she explains. “The vascular and capillary regions of the eyes in particular can be significantly weakened, which may result in vision problems. Hawthorn essentially reduces the risks of this side-effect of aspirin by supporting the blood vessels.”

Hawthorn has been used to treat heart disease since the first century AD, and in recent times its cardio-protective effects have undergone extensive scientific research. Studies have found that the herb contains antioxidant flavonoids, including quercetin, and oligomeric procyanidins (OPCs), which are also present in grapes. OPCs, according to both animal and human studies, appear to help dilate blood vessels, increase coronary artery blood flow, improve circulation, and protect the blood vessels from damage – actions that are crucial to people who have the potential to develop blood clots. It also helps lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Dr Rogers comments that she has never encountered any side effects from hawthorn, despite selling many thousands of litres over the years. However, some studies suggest there is the possibility of side effects and drug interactions – and this is the reason why it’s important to consult a natural therapist rather than self-prescribe so they can monitor this aspect.

One final point: “It’s vital to understand that results may take time to manifest, depending on the person’s age, the integrity of their veins and capillaries, and other medications they may have been prescribed,” Dr Rogers cautions.

About the Study

Conducted by Gerald Liew, Ph.D. and colleagues at the Centre for Vision Research at the Westmead Millennium Institute for Medical Research, the study involved a prospective analysis of data from the Blue Mountains Eye Study, which included four examinations over a period of 15 years.

Of the 2389 participants, 257 (10.8 per cent) were regular aspirin users. The cumulative incidence of neovascular AMD in regular users was 1.9 per cent at five years, 7 per cent at 10 years and 9.3 per cent at 15 years. Among non-regular aspirin users, the cumulative incidence of neovascular AMD was 0.8 per cent at five years, 1.6 per cent at 10 years, and 3.7 per cent at 15 years.

This suggests regular aspirin use increases the risk of developing neovascular AMD. Moreover, the risk appears to be independent of a history of smoking, a known preventable risk factor for AMD.

A five-year European study published in 2012 also suggested regular aspirin use – defined as one or more tablets per week in the previous 12 months – was associated with AMD.

With some 100 billion tablets consumed every year, aspirin ranks as one of the most widely used medications in the world.

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For Editors' Information: Some Research into Hawthorn's Cardio-Protective Effects

Source: www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/hawthorn-000256.htm#ixzz2JP6ldhLW

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