

Should You Take Aspirin Daily to Prevent Cancer?

Millions of Americans already take low-dose aspirin daily for heart-healthy benefits, and the findings of new federally funded research suggests the long-used painkiller may offer protection against colon cancer.

But while the latest findings on aspirin and cancer are promising, a top cancer specialist tells *Newsmax Health* you shouldn't automatically assume the painkiller is safe and effective for everyone.

It's also important to keep in mind that effective diagnostic tests—including colonoscopy—are still the best way to combat colorectal cancer by catching it, and treating it, early.

"Daily aspirin may provide some protection against colon cancer but I'm concerned that some people may misinterpret this recommendation and think that they can skip their colonoscopy," says Bipan Chand, M.D., division chief for minimally invasive surgery and director of surgical endoscopy at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Illinois.

Dr. Chand's comments were made in reference to a new federal health guideline issued this week that recommends aspirin for people at high risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

The recommendation, published in a draft report from the United States Preventive Services Task Force, was the first time that a major American medical organization had issued a recommendation suggesting aspirin may prevent a form of cancer.

The task force is an influential one and its recommendations have often led to changes in the way American healthcare is practiced.

Colon cancer is the nation's third leading cause of cancer death. An estimated 145,000 people are diagnosed with colon cancer each year, and 50,000 die, according to American Cancer Society statistics.

In its recommendation, the influential government panel said the benefits of aspirin outweighed the risk for people ages 50 to 69 who are at high risk for heart disease. The biggest benefit was seen in high-risk individuals in their 50s.

The recommendation is weaker for high-risk Americans ages 60 to 69 because of the concern that aspirin, which is a blood thinner, can cause harmful bleeding in some people. Those younger than 50 or 70 and older are being urged to consult a doctor for a customized recommendation on aspirin.

The risk of bleeding is not only a concern for older people, but can also occur in anyone who takes aspirin, notes Dr. Chand.

"I hope everyone will treat this recommendation cautiously and consult their doctor," he adds. "Most individuals who take aspirin and aspirin-like products are at an increased risk for gastrointestinal upsets ranging from gastritis to a catastrophic bleed, so you have to be careful."

The task force said its recommendation is based on studies that have shown that people who have taken aspirin long-term (at least 5 to 10 years) have a reduced risk of colon cancer.

But Dr. Chand notes that the evidence in favor of aspirin therapy as a means of preventing cardiovascular disease is stronger than in the case of colon cancer—at least at present.

"Aspirin is a blood thinner so it prevents blood clots that can cause heart attack and stroke. In the case of colon cancer, aspirin is associated with lower risk but we don't know if that's a causality," he explains.

To prevent colon cancer, Dr. Chand recommends following the federal government's screening guidelines, which call for most people to begin regularly scheduled colonoscopies at the age of 50.

African-Americans and people at risk for heredity colon cancer generally begin screening at earlier ages, he says.

Although colonoscopies are the main form of prevention, obesity and a high-fat diet are also linked to colon cancer, so people should maintain an ideal weight and eat a diet that is low in fat and high in fiber, he adds.

For the original article, visit .