Baby Aspirin Boosts Survival for Certain Cancers

Taking low-dose aspirin is beneficial for those with head and neck cancers and lung cancers.

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Aspirin has been found to reduce the risk of certain cancers, including ovarian and liver cancer. But this common pain reliever also improves survival for people with head and neck cancers and lung cancer, according to new study findings presented at the American Society for Therapeutic Radiation Oncology, reports Roswell Park.

The first study involved 460 patients with head and neck squamous cell carcinoma who received chemotherapy and conventional radiation therapy as treatment. Researchers concluded that taking a low-dose aspirin—as well as other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)—in conjunction with their cancer treatment increased their survival by 8% at five years.

“We were especially interested to see that these patients lived longer even though the anti-inflammatory drugs did not seem to have an impact on the effectiveness of cancer treatment,” said Austin Iovolo, MD, of the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at the University of Buffalo, the study’s lead author and a resident in the department of supportive care at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Another study examined the data of 164 patients with lung cancer who received stereotactic body radiation therapy, a form of radiotherapy that involves precise delivery of radiation to tumors using intense beams from several angles, for early-stage non-small-cell lung cancer, the most common form of the disease. Findings showed that those who took aspirin while undergoing SBRT had overall better survival than those who didn’t. Patients who took aspirin had a two-year overall survival of 57%, while those who didn’t take the drug had an overall survival of only 48%.

The mechanisms by which low-dose aspirin may stop existing cancer from spreading are not fully understood. Nor is even low-dose aspirin appropriate for everyone—for example, it can be dangerous for people who are also taking blood-thinning medications. But the growing list of cancer types for which low-dose aspirin is beneficial means it may be a good topic for people in treatment to bring up with their oncologists.

“These studies provide further support for a growing body of literature that demonstrates a benefit for use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as aspirin, by cancer patients,” said Gregory

Hermann, MD, a resident physician in radiation medicine at Roswell Park and the Jacobs School. “Although clinical trials are needed to make a definitive recommendation, we encourage patients to have a discussion with their doctor regarding the risks and potential benefits of aspirin use.”

For similar coverage, read “Can Daily Aspirin Prevent Cancer?” and “Common Pain Reliver Can Improved Survival in Head and Neck Cancer.”

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