

Over-the-counter pain medications may reduce risk of Parkinson's disease

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Over-the-counter pain medications known as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may reduce a person's risk of Parkinson's disease, according to a study published in the November 6, 2007, issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

"Given our results and the growing burden of Parkinson's disease as people age, there's a pressing need for further studies explaining why these drugs may play a protective role," said study author Angelika D. Wahner, PhD, with the UCLA School of Public Health in Los Angeles.

The study involved 579 men and women, half of whom had Parkinson's disease. The participants were asked if they had taken aspirin and if they had taken non-aspirin NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen, once a week or more at any point in their life for at least a month.

Participants were considered regular users of aspirin or non-aspirin NSAIDs if they took two or more pills a week for at least one month. Non-regular users were those who took fewer pills.

The study found regular users of non-aspirin NSAIDs reduced their risk of Parkinson's disease by as much as 60 percent compared to non-regular users and non-users. Women who were regular users of aspirin reduced their risk of Parkinson's disease by 40 percent, especially among those who regularly used aspirin for more than two years.

"Our findings suggest NSAIDs are protective against Parkinson's disease, with a particularly strong protective effect among regular users of non-aspirin NSAIDs, especially those who reported two or more years of use," said Wahner. "Interestingly, aspirin only benefited women. It may be that men are taking lower doses of aspirin for heart problems, while women may be using higher doses for arthritis or headaches."

"It's possible the anti-inflammatory agent in NSAIDs may contribute to the observed protective effect of the drugs, but the exact mechanism isn't clear and further research is needed," said the study's principal investigator Beate Ritz, MD, PhD, with UCLA School of Public Health.

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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