

Scientists prove regular aspirin intake halves cancer risk

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Scientists including those from Queen's University have discovered that taking regular aspirin halves the risk of developing hereditary cancers.

Hereditary cancers are those which develop as a result of a gene fault inherited from a parent. Bowel and [womb](#) cancers are the most common forms of hereditary cancers. Fifty thousand people in the UK are diagnosed with bowel and womb cancers every year; 10 per cent of these cancers are thought to be hereditary.

The decade-long study, which involved scientists and [clinicians](#) from 43 centres in 16 countries and was funded by Cancer Research UK, followed nearly 1,000 patients, in some cases for over 10 years. The study found that those who had been taking a regular dose of aspirin had 50 per cent fewer incidences of hereditary cancer compared with those who were not taking aspirin.

The research focused on people with Lynch syndrome which is an inherited [genetic disorder](#) that causes cancer by affecting [genes](#) responsible for detecting and repairing damage in the [DNA](#). Around 50 per cent of those with Lynch syndrome develop cancer, mainly in the bowel and womb. The study looked at all cancers related to the syndrome, and found that almost 30 per cent of the patients not taking aspirin had developed a cancer compared to around 15 per cent of those taking the aspirin.

Those who had taken aspirin still developed the same number of [polyps](#), which are thought to be precursors of cancer, as those who did not take aspirin but they did not go on to develop cancer. It suggests that aspirin could possibly be causing these cells to destruct before they turn cancerous.

Over 1,000 people were diagnosed with [bowel cancer](#) in Northern Ireland last year; 400 of these died from the disease. Ten per cent of bowel cancer cases are hereditary and by taking aspirin

regularly the number of those dying from the hereditary form of the disease could be halved.

Professor Patrick Morrison from Queen's University in Belfast, who led the [Northern Ireland](#) part of the study, said: "The results of this study, which has been ongoing for over a decade, proves that the regular intake of aspirin over a prolonged period halves the risk of developing hereditary cancers. The effects of aspirin in the first five years of the study were not clear but in those who took aspirin for between five and ten years the results were very clear."

"This is a huge breakthrough in terms of cancer prevention. For those who have a history of hereditary cancers in their family, like bowel and womb cancers, this will be welcome news. Not only does it show we can reduce cancer rates and ultimately deaths, it opens up other avenues for further cancer prevention research. We aim now to go forward with another trial to assess the most effective dosage of aspirin for hereditary [cancer prevention](#) and to look at the use of aspirin in the general population as a way of reducing the risk of bowel cancer.

"For anyone considering taking aspirin I would recommend discussing this with your GP first as [aspirin](#) is known to bring with it a risk of stomach complaints, including ulcers." The research is due to be published in the *Lancet* Online on Oct. 28 2011.

More information: www.capp3.org/

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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