



## An "aspirin a day" not the best idea for health

Recent television commercials touting "an aspirin a day" as preventive medicine are misleading.

The ads, run by aspirin companies, point to a 1988 study from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that indicates that men in the **high risk** group who took aspirin had half the number of heart attacks than those in the group who didn't take aspirin. What the commercials fail to mention is that those taking aspirin suffered more strokes as a result.

Because of this and limitations in the study's methodology the report's authors concluded that the public should **not** start taking "an aspirin a day" like the commercials suggest.

Fred Molitor, Ph.D, says in *Health Communication* magazine, "The possible implications of the manner in which the five largest newspapers reported the study are such that individuals may have started taking aspirin regularly to prevent heart attacks, a practice which can lead to serious health consequences such as strokes." The newspaper articles were based largely on press releases distributed by aspirin makers. ▲



## Overuse of common analgesics lead to kidney failure

*The American Journal of Kidney Diseases* reports that *The National Kidney Foundation* says chronic use of a combination of acetaminophen and aspirin, such as that found in brands like Excedrin, is so dangerous that it should not be sold over the counter.

In fact, it is so dangerous that between 8 and 10 percent of chronic kidney failure can be attributed to overuse of these combination analgesics, says Dr. William Henrich of the National Kidney Foundation.

The problems lies in the fact that, over time, acetaminophen and aspirin seem to work together to produce scarring and calcification of kidney tissue, eventually shutting them down.

Dr. William Bennett of the Foundation's advisory board said he defines chronic use as "taking two to three doses (as indicated on the label) every day." An accumulated lifetime dosage of 1.5 kilograms is considered excessive use. At the rate of two doses of Excedrin per day, it would only take four years to reach that limit, assuming that the person didn't take any other analgesics. Part of the problem, Bennet said, is that people assume that if a drug is sold over the counter, it is safe. ▲

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## ■ Tylenol changes label: warns of danger to children

The *Associated Press* reported on October 19, 1997 that the maker of Tylenol, McNeil Consumer Products Co., will change bottle labels and advertising to inform parents that even small overdoses of acetaminophen (the active ingredient in Tylenol) can harm their children.

The change was prompted by the FDA because overdoses in children happen too easily. One problem is that Tylenol for children and infants comes in different flavors and is sold as a safe alternative to aspirin. What consumers were not told is that as little as twice the normal dosage over a period of time could destroy their children's livers. Another problem is that people don't understand that Tylenol for infants comes in a concentrated formula that is much stronger than Children's Tylenol. Because people naturally assume that the infant's formula is not as strong as the children's, overdose in infants occurs very easily.

Dr. John Bolton, a San Francisco pediatrician says "The vast majority of people think that acetaminophen is a very innocuous chemical and don't think twice about using it four or five times a day for a very minor fever."

The American Association of Poison Control Centers says that in 1996 there were 31,511 events of inappropriate exposure to pediatric acetaminophen products in children under 6. ▲

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## ■ FDA recommends alcohol warnings on pain relievers

In November, 1997, the United States Food and Drug Administration said that mixing Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDS) and alcohol is so dangerous that warning labels should be put on the pain reliever labels. NSAIDS are commonly sold over-the-counter and include aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen and others.

In making this proposal, the FDA would like to see labels suggest that users consult their doctor if they drink three or more alcoholic beverages per day.

Referring to studies showing liver damage and stomach bleeding, Dr. Michael Friedman, Acting FDA Commissioner, said "Consumption of excessive alcohol while taking pain relievers can be dangerous to your health."

According to Dr. David Flockhart of Georgetown University, there is no way to predict who will have problems with the mix and those that are injured are usually injured severely.

This proposal opens a 90-day comment period to allow for public input on the proposed rule. After that, the final ruling will be made on the labels.

The Aspirin Foundation of America, an industry trade association, announced that it would fight the FDA proposal. ▲

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## ■ Pain medication can cause chronic headaches

The March, 1998 issue of the *Western Journal of Medicine* tells us that many people who suffer from chronic headaches can find relief if they quit taking daily headache medicine.

This phenomenon is known as rebound headaches, which are caused by the daily use of headache medication. Over time, taking daily pain medication can result in drug resistant headaches.

The author of the article, Dr. Morris Maizels, found that of patients who experienced chronic daily headaches, almost 80% of them experienced a significant reduction of symptoms just by cutting out their daily use of pain pills.

Dr. Maizels says that as little as three aspirin on a daily basis can cause rebound headaches, which can resemble migraines. Once they stop taking pain medication daily, he says, they may feel worse for about two weeks before improvement begins. He added that most people can stop immediately but some may require a gradual reduction process. ▲



## Painkillers do not relieve workout soreness

The July, 2000 issue of the *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* reports that pain relievers do little, if anything, to ease the common muscle soreness that occurs from working out too hard.

Researchers found that treatment with aspirin, acetaminophen and codeine did nothing to relieve post-workout soreness that normally occurs after working a muscle to exhaustion. The drugs also did nothing to help the delayed-onset soreness that occurs the morning after too much exertion.

The authors go on to say, "only time takes away the pain."

We are curious as to how much money was spent on this research that could have been spent elsewhere.

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## ■ Aspirin a day dangerous

The November 11, 2000 issue of the *British Medical Journal* finds that even small doses of aspirin every day can cause such serious damage to the body that patients need to reconsider very closely the trade-off between the possible benefits and the likely damage.

According to the study, in which doctors reviewed 24 different studies involving almost 66,000 patients, people over 50 who take the drug daily almost double their chances of developing ulcers and internal bleeding which can lead to death.

The researchers found that "no evidence exists that reducing the dose or using modified release formulations would reduce the incidence of gastrointestinal haemorrhage."



## Pain Medication Abuse Can Give Kids Headaches

The June, 2001 issue of the *Journal of Child Neurology* reports that overuse of common over-the-counter pain medications (aspirin, acetaminophen, etc.) can trigger chronic headaches in adolescents.

The study was done at the Meir General Hospital in Kfar Saba, Israel. According to one of the researchers, Dr. Rachel Hering-Hanit, “Pediatricians . . . should be aware of the possibility that the continuous progressive increase in headache frequency might be due to abuse.” She went on to say, “They should avoid advising children to take pain medications ‘at liberty’.”

In commentary, imagine waking up in the middle of the night because your smoke alarm is going off, taking the batteries out and going back to bed. Wouldn't you want to find out what's causing the smoke? Taking pain medications is much the same way; simply ‘turning off’ symptoms does not mean that you have reached and taken care of the underlying problem.

Perhaps a better approach is to restore health and proper function through Chiropractic Care. Keeping a body working right is a lot easier than getting one working right again.

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## ■ Acetaminophen Dangers Documented

The December 17, 2002 issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine* reports that the most widely used nonprescription pain reliever Acetaminophen (the active ingredient in Tylenol) is responsible for much more liver damage than previously thought.

The study examined 308 cases of acute liver failure. 39% of the failures were caused by acetaminophen toxicity. According to Dr. William Lee, principal investigator and professor of internal medicine at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, “We were surprised to find that the number of people with liver damage from acetaminophen was three times that of all other prescription drugs.”

79% of the acetaminophen toxicity cases were women. According to Lee, “we don’t know if this is because women take more acetaminophen-containing drugs than men do, if women’s livers are more vulnerable, or if it’s because they are smaller.”

Most of the toxicity cases were accidental, the result of people mixing medications that contain acetaminophen. Acetaminophen is so pervasive in the over the counter market that mixing pain, cough and sleep medications can easily add up to a dangerous dose of the drug.

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## ■ Painkillers increase risk of miscarriage

The August 14, 2003 issue of the British Medical Journal reports that pregnant women taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) such as aspirin and ibuprofen can greatly increase their chance of miscarriage, particularly if taken shortly after conception.

The researchers say the risk of miscarriage may increase by as much as 80%.

NSAIDS, which act on the whole body, suppress fatty acids which are necessary for an embryo to implant itself in the womb.

“These findings will need confirmation,” say the authors. “Meanwhile, it may be prudent for physicians and women who are planning to be pregnant to be aware of this potential risk and avoid using NSAIDS around [the time of] conception.”

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## ■ Aspirin Use Linked With Pancreatic Cancer

A study presented at an October, 2003 meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research in Phoenix, Arizona says that women who take an aspirin-a-day may run a higher risk of developing pancreatic cancer.

Dr. Eva Schernhammer of Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston led the study involving more than 88,000 nurses. Schernhammer found that female nurses who took two or more aspirin a week for 20 years or more ran a 58 percent higher risk for pancreatic cancer. Women who took 14 or more per week had an 86 percent higher risk.

The findings surprised doctors because they originally thought that the aspirin would offer protection against pancreatic cancer.

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## ■ Chiropractic beats acetaminophen for chronic neck pain

In July of 1996 the *Foundation for Chiropractic Education and Research (FCER)* reported that chiropractic adjustments helped patients with chronic neck pain better than acetaminophen.

During the six week trial, the chiropractic patients not only reported an improvement in neck pain but also range of motion, strength and functional capacity over the patients taking acetaminophen.

Chiropractic care is not just for pain relief. It improves function in all body systems without the dangers associated with drugs that alter body function. ▲



## New NSAID Pain Drugs Cause Stomach Bleeding

The June 12, 2004 issue of the British Medical Journal reports that increased use of the new generation of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) known as cox-2 inhibitors has been linked with an increase in stomach bleeding.

Even though they are much more expensive, cox-2 inhibitors have become very popular in recent years because the makers claim the new drugs are safer than aspirin. This study, done at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences in Toronto, Canada suggests that may not be the case.

The researchers found that a 41% increase in use of cox-2 inhibitors (Celebrex, Vioxx, Mobicox and others) in Ontario caused a 10% increase in gastrointestinal bleeding cases. In fact, the rise in bleeding incidents rises proportionally with the rise in use.

In the elderly population the study focused on, this figure would represent an additional 650 stomach bleeding hospitalizations each year in Ontario alone. “That’s a lot of people going to the hospital,” said lead researcher Muhammad Mamdant, a doctor of pharmacy.

“I was actually not expecting such a rise – just because everyone really does believe these drugs are safer,” he said. “And I think there is a need for a more judicious use of these drugs, by both patients and physicians.”

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## Acetaminophen Use Linked To Asthma

The April 1, 2004 issue of the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine reports that people taking acetaminophen on a regular basis suffered a greater incidence of adult-onset asthma.

Acetaminophen is the active ingredient in Tylenol and other over-the-counter pain relievers. In the study, 299 patients newly diagnosed with adult-onset asthma were asked about acetaminophen use. 108 used no acetaminophen while 191 used the drug from 1 to more than 22 times per month.

Acetaminophen has been known to produce spasms of the bronchial tubes in the lungs leading to airway restriction and symptoms of asthma.



## Too Much Acetaminophen Can Be Deadly

A January 22, 2004 article by the Associated Press reports that increasingly, too many Americans are accidentally overdosing on the over-the-counter pain reliever acetaminophen, best known as Tylenol.

In a new consumer education campaign, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has released a warning for consumers to follow the directions on the labels of **all** over-the-counter pain relievers in order to avoid dangerous or potentially lethal side effects.

Acetaminophen topped the FDA's warning list since it is in more than 600 products that treat pain, colds, flu and coughs.

The FDA warns that acetaminophen overdose is common since many people don't read drug labels and combine different medications containing the drug. Sometimes people take extra pills in hopes of faster pain relief. In either case, taking too much acetaminophen can damage the liver beyond repair.

In 2002 the FDA's own scientific advisors urged that warning labels be placed directly on the labels of over-the-counter painkillers to make sure consumers are aware of the risk.

This campaign falls well short of those recommendations since the FDA has decided to only allot \$20,000 for development of an informational brochure that the FDA **hopes** will be distributed by pharmacy chains. The FDA also **hopes** major magazines will run the ads for free.

According to the FDA, more than 56,000 emergency room visits and approximately 100 deaths a year are due to acetaminophen overdoses.



## NSAIDs More Dangerous Than Previously Thought

The September 1, 2005 issue of the American Heart Association journal *Hypertension* reports that regular use of the Non Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil) have been linked to an increase in blood pressure.

While high doses of both drugs have long been associated with liver and kidney damage, this study found double the risk of high blood pressure in women who regularly took as little as one extra-strength Tylenol or its equivalent a day. The researchers say this study raises new concerns about the dangers of the over-the-counter (OTC) painkillers.

The study was conducted at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, MA. Painkiller use in 5123 women was tracked for three years through the use of detailed questionnaires. None of the women had high blood pressure when the study began.

Older women (51 to 77 years) who took 500 mg of acetaminophen every day had a 93 percent increased risk of developing hypertension compared to non-users. The younger group of women (34 to 53 years) had a 99 percent increased risk.

The researchers also went so far as to say that regular use of NSAIDs could be a contributing factor in the increase in hypertension in the U.S.

Lead researcher Dr. John Forman, of the Harvard Medical School said that if the study had lasted longer, they may have found that even lower doses of acetaminophen may be associated with high blood pressure. "We should avoid the belief that all OTC medications are safe, when, in fact, they are not."