



The Possible Connection Between NSAIDs and Cardiovascular Health Risks

Studies reveal safety concerns about certain over-the-counter (OTC) medications, including non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). These medications are used by millions of people for relief of pain and inflammation associated with a variety of chronic conditions, such as arthritis. Examples are Advil® (ibuprofen), Aleve® (naproxen), and Motrin® (ibuprofen). Over the last several years, there has been a continuing debate as to whether NSAIDs pose a safety concern related to cardiovascular disease.

In September of 2004, Merck & Co., the manufacturer of the arthritis drug Vioxx (a prescription NSAID), announced the voluntary, worldwide recall of the brand after a clinical trial confirmed previous studies linking Vioxx to serious cardiovascular problems, including heart attack and stroke.

More recently, focus has shifted to the results of a comprehensive meta-analysis published in the *British Medical Journal*. The conclusion of this analysis stated that little evidence supported the safety of those NSAIDs investigated (including OTC NSAIDs ibuprofen and naproxen, and prescription NSAIDs lumiracoxib, celecoxib, diclofenac, and etoricoxib).

Conducted by researchers at the University of Bern, Switzerland, the analysis indicated that all of the studied drugs were responsible for increasing cardiovascular risk, not only when taken over long periods of time, but possibly also when used for short durations. The article reviewed effects on myocardial infarction (heart attack), stroke, cardiovascular deaths, and deaths from any cause. The composite of the analysis showed that NSAIDs increased overall risk.

Of all the drugs tested, naproxen seemed to be the safest. However, its relative risk for stroke was 1.76 (that is, 1.76 times the risk of stroke in the control group). Relative risk for death from any cause was 1.23 with a composite of 1.22. Even the safest drug studied showed increased risk. In addition, naproxen may cause gastrointestinal distress as a common side effect.

The authors of the article concluded that "The options for treatment of chronic musculoskeletal pain are limited, and patients and clinicians need to be aware that cardiovascular risk needs to be taken into account when prescribing these drugs."

The complete study can be viewed [here](#).

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