

Naproxen and Risk of Heart Attack and Stroke

Recently, Naproxen, a drug considered so safe it has been sold over-the-counter for the last ten years under the brand name Aleve[®], was reported to cause an increase in heart attacks and strokes compared to placebo. Data gathered from a National Institute of Health Clinical trial suggests that patients taking Naproxen at a dose of 220 mg twice daily have a 50 percent greater risk of heart problems -- including heart attack and stroke -- than patients taking placebo.

Data collected over the past decade have suggested that many commonly used classes of anti-inflammatory pain relief medications may increase cardiovascular risk. However, we do not know the magnitude of the increased risk or what role other factors, such as age, may play in increasing the risk.

Because of the conflicting information regarding non-aspirin NSAIDs,* UW Health recommends the following for patients with pain due to arthritis, musculoskeletal injuries, or other causes for which NSAIDs or COX-2 inhibitors** usually are used.

Patients with congestive heart failure, kidney disease, hypertension, or those at high risk of gastrointestinal bleeding should contact their physician before using NSAIDs.

For all other patients:

1. Use non-pharmacological therapy when possible (ice, rest, stretching, etc.). Explore complimentary techniques such as meditation, biofeedback and acupuncture.
2. Use acetaminophen at recommended doses if you do not have liver problems or drink more than 2 alcohol-containing beverages a day.
3. If 1 and 2 are not effective, NSAIDs may be used with the following guidelines:
 - use the lowest effective dose possible
 - try to use intermittent rather than continuous therapy
 - control your cardiac risk factors (achieve an ideal body weight, blood pressure and cholesterol values, stop smoking, exercise regularly and eat properly)
4. Speak with your physician about safe use of pain medications and other alternatives, if necessary.

* NSAIDs are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as Naprosyn[®] or Aleve[®] (naproxen), Motrin[®] or Advil[®] (ibuprofen) and others

** COX-2 inhibitors include Vioxx[®] (rofecoxib), Bextra[®] (valdecoxib), and Celebrex[®] (celecoxib), among others.