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ASPIRIN CAN PREVENT
HEART ATTACK IN ANGINA PATIENTS

DALLAS--People with chest pain caused by blockage of one or more coronary arteries may prevent heart attacks by taking low-dose aspirin, according to Dr. John E. Willard, assistant professor of internal medicine at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

He defines "low dose" as one regular-strength tablet (325 mg) every other day, or lesser strengths once daily.

For people with no outward symptoms of heart disease, however, the risks of bleeding and other side effects of aspirin (including a slight, though statistically insignificant increase in the possibility of stroke) may outweigh its benefits. In this group, regular use of aspirin is indicated only for men over 50 with high cholesterol and for women with high blood pressure and/or high cholesterol who also smoke, Willard said.

He and two other UT Southwestern cardiologists are authors of an article titled "The Use of Aspirin in Ischemic Heart Disease," in the July 16 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. The article surveys and draws conclusions from the massive and sometimes confusing literature on aspirin and heart disease. Co-authors with Willard are Dr. L. David Hillis, holder of the Jan and Henri Bromberg Professorship in Internal Medicine, and Richard A. Lange, assistant professor of internal medicine.

The data to support the use of aspirin by heart-attack

(More)

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survivors are "less compelling" than for people with stable or unstable angina, said Willard. "There have been six or seven studies which, taken individually, don't have the statistical power to prove a benefit," he said. "However, two studies that pooled data from the others--a method of analysis that's still somewhat controversial--demonstrated a reduction in heart attack and death."

Stable angina is chest pain produced by a predictable level of exercise. If the exertion required to bring on chest pain lessens or if chest pain occurs at rest, the term "unstable angina" is used. Without medical intervention, the latter condition may lead to a heart attack.

Aspirin, the generic name for acetylsalicylic acid, prevents heart attacks by inhibiting the tendency of blood cells called platelets to clump and form clots, which can block the arteries that feed the heart. Aspirin was developed in the late 19th century as a synthetic derivative of salicylate, a constituent of several plants used since the dawn of civilization for the relief of pain and inflammation.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School, affiliated teaching hospitals and outpatient clinics.