

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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NEW ARTHRITIS DRUG MAY RELIEVE PAIN WITHOUT GI SIDE EFFECTS

DALLAS — July 29, 1997 — Rheumatologists at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas are testing a new drug that may reduce joint pain and inflammation without causing the gastrointestinal irritation that often occurs when taking existing nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

Dr. Arthur Kavanaugh, associate professor of internal medicine, is recruiting patients with osteoarthritis for the study. Patients will be treated with celecoxib, one of a new class of drugs that block enzymes responsible for arthritis symptoms without attacking related enzymes that protect the stomach and small intestine.

"This drug might help us eliminate the Catch 22 dilemma we have in treating arthritis with NSAIDs," said Kavanaugh, who is conducting the study at the Dallas Veterans Affairs Medical Center. "The drugs we currently use relieve pain and inflammation, but sometimes they don't stop there."

Some common NSAIDs include aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen sodium.

NSAIDs inhibit cyclooxygenase (COX), an enzyme that plays a key role in the production of prostaglandins, naturally occurring substances that cause inflammation and pain in the joints. Unfortunately, NSAIDs also affect some prostaglandins that protect the lining of the stomach and small intestine, help maintain kidney function and help blood clot following injury or surgery.

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Recent research has found two forms of the COX enzyme — COX-1 and COX-2. The COX-1 enzyme is found in most human tissues and produces the beneficial prostaglandins that protect the gastrointestinal tract. COX-2 is activated by arthritis and other stimuli and produces the prostaglandins that lead to inflammation, swelling and joint pain. NSAIDs indiscriminately target both COX-1 and COX-2. Celecoxib inhibits only the COX-2 enzyme.

"If the drug is able to significantly inhibit COX-2 but doesn't block the COX-1 enzyme, then we can offer the patient the benefits of NSAIDs without the risks," said Kavanaugh.

The risk of hospitalization for regular NSAID users is five times higher than for the general population. An estimated 20,000 people with osteoarthritis and 2,000 people with rheumatoid arthritis die each year from NSAID-induced gastrointestinal problems.

To find out if you're eligible to participate in the celecoxib study, which is funded by G.D. Searle & Co, please call (214) 376-5451, Ext. 7125.

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