Could Aspirin Make Cancer WORSE?!

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Low-dose aspirin or baby aspirin is commonly used to lower risk of cardiovascular events (those affecting to heart and surrounding blood vessels) events. Through observational and clinical studies, aspirin has also been shown to reduce the risk of a cancer diagnosis and reduce death from cancer.

Aspirin’s cancer prevention potential has been best studied in colorectal cancer. However, findings from a recent randomized trial suggest that aspirin may have the opposite effect for older adults. The study included 19,000 healthy older adults (ages 70 or older) who were equally likely to be diagnosed with cancer. Each participant was randomly assigned aspirin or a placebo and was monitored throughout the duration of the study.

Out of all the participants, 1,900 were ultimately diagnosed with cancer. The use of aspirin did not appear to contribute or cause any particular kind of cancer. Researchers did find that participants using aspirin had a 20% higher chance of being diagnosed with cancer and a 30% higher chance of dying from advanced cancer. A very unexpected result was that the participants in the aspirin group had a 77% higher chance of dying from colorectal cancer than participants not taking aspirin.

The reason for the different effects of aspirin on young versus elderly people is not known. The researchers are looking into whether the differences are due to changes that occur in the immune system as people age. The researchers are planning to look more closely at the impact of aspirin on the immune system. Longer tracking of the participants may also yield important clues.

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