

Study shows daily aspirin intake can lead to blindness

October 5 2011, by Deborah Braconnier

(Medical Xpress) -- A new study published in *Ophthalmology* reveals that while taking a daily aspirin may reduce the risks of heart disease and stroke, a disturbing side effect has also been noted to increase the risk of developing macular degeneration.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss in Americans over the age of 60 and affects millions of Americans. It is an age related disease that destroys the [central vision](#) by killing cells in the macula. Macular degeneration comes in two forms known as dry and wet. Dry macular degeneration is more common and less severe while wet macular degeneration is the more severe.

Researchers, led by Dr. Paulus de Jong from the Netherlands Institute for [Neuroscience](#) and Academic Medical center, looked at medical information on some 4,700 adults over the age of 65. Of those patients, 839 were taking [aspirin](#) on a daily basis. The researchers discovered that out of those 839, 36 suffered from an advanced form of macular degeneration known as wet macular degeneration. This works out to about four out of every 100 patients on daily aspirin.

When they looked at patients that were not taking aspirin on a daily basis, the number dropped to only two out of every 100 diagnosed with wet macular degeneration. The researchers learned that the aspirin connection seems to only relate to the increased risk to wet macular degeneration and not to the dry form of the disease.

This study does not show that aspirin causes the [vision loss](#) but that it may somehow exacerbate the disease. The researchers warn that while cautioning patients on the risk to visual health when taking daily aspirin is advisable, the risk does not outweigh the cardiovascular benefits in patients with cardiovascular disease.

De Jong says that larger studies are needed in order to follow patients over time to see just how daily aspirin use plays a role in macular degeneration and if there is a way to reap the cardiovascular benefits while reducing the risk of vision complications.

More information: Associations between Aspirin Use and Aging Macula Disorder: The European Eye Study, *Ophthalmology*, [doi:10.1016/j.ophtha.2011.06.025](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ophtha.2011.06.025)

Abstract

Objective

To study associations between aspirin use and early and late aging macula disorder (AMD).

Design

Population-based cross-sectional European Eye Study in 7 centers from northern to southern Europe.

Participants

In total, 4691 participants 65 years of age and older, collected by random sampling.

Methods

Aspirin intake and possible confounders for AMD were ascertained by a structured questionnaire. Ophthalmic and basic systemic measurements were performed in a standardized way. The study classified AMD according to the modified International Classification System on digitized fundus images at 1 grading center. Nonfasting blood samples were analyzed in a single laboratory. Associations were analyzed by

logistic regression.

Main Outcome Measures

Odds ratios (ORs) for AMD in aspirin users.

Results

Early AMD was present in 36.4% of the participants and late AMD was present in 3.3% of participants. Monthly aspirin use was reported by 1931 (41.2%), at least once weekly by 7%, and daily use by 17.3%. For daily aspirin users, the ORs, adjusted for potential confounders, showed a steady increase with increasing severity of AMD grades. These were: grade 1, 1.26 (95% confidence interval [CI], 1.08–1.46; P

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