

Aspirin may slow the decline in mental capacity among elderly patients

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A daily dose of acetylsalicylic acid equivalent to a fourth of an aspirin may slow the decline in intellectual capacity among elderly individuals with high cardiovascular risk. This is shown in a study by Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Researchers at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg, over a five year period studied how intellectual capacity changes among 681 elderly women (70 to 92 years) with heightened risk of suffering from a heart attack, vascular spasm or stroke.

Of the 681 women, 129 received a low daily dose of acetylsalicylic acid, equivalent to a fourth of an aspirin, to prevent [heart disease](#). The Gothenburg study shows that acetylsalicylic acid also slowed decline in brain capacity among the [elderly women](#).

In the study, published in [British Medical Journal Open](#), the women underwent various tests to measure their [physical health](#) and intellectual capacity, such as language and memory tests.

"At the end of the five year examination period mental capacity had declined among all the women and the portion that suffered from dementia was equally large in the entire group. However, the decline in brain capacity was significantly less and occurred at a slower pace among the women who received acetylsalicylic acid," says Silke Kern, researcher at Sahlgrenska Academy.

The effect remained even when age, [genetic factors](#) and use of anti-inflammatory drugs were taken into account.

In addition to preventing heart disease, acetylsalicylic acid has been shown to be effective against cancer according to several scientific studies. It is common practice in many countries to treat women at risk for heart disease with a small dose of acetylsalicylic acid – but not in Sweden.

Silke Kern emphasizes that the study is an observational study and that more research is necessary before any definitive conclusions can be made.

"Our results indicate that acetylsalicylic acid may protect the brain, at least among women at high risk for a heart attack or stroke. However, we do not know the long term effects of routine treatment. We certainly do not want to encourage the elderly to self-medicate with aspirin to avoid dementia," she states.

The research group in Gothenburg has now started a follow-up study that will follow the older women for an additional five years.

More information: The study Does low-dose acetylsalicylic acid prevent cognitive decline in women with high cardiovascular risk? A 5-year follow-up of a non-demented population-based cohort of Swedish elderly women was published in *BJM Open* on October 3, 2012.

bmjopen.bmj.com/content/2/5/e001288.long

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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