

Research reveals how aspirin helps prevent colon cancer

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New research offers insight into why regular, long-term use of low-dose

aspirin may reduce the risk of death from colon and rectal cancers.

Researchers found that [aspirin](#) prevents [blood cells](#) called platelets from producing an enzyme that allows them to clump together. Tumor cells can attach to these clumps and spread (metastasize) throughout the body.

"Aspirin inhibits [platelet activation](#), which also could inhibit metastases," said lead author Jane Figueiredo, director of Community and Population Health Research at the Samuel Oschin Cancer Institute at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

The use of non-aspirin, [nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs](#) (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen and naproxen wasn't associated with better outcomes.

For the study, Figueiredo's team analyzed data from more than 2,500 colon and rectal cancer patients in the United States.

Timing of the aspirin use appears to be critical, according to the study. Patients who used it for at least 15 months before being diagnosed with localized colon or rectal cancer were less likely to see their tumor spread.

"More evidence is needed, but this association between baby aspirin and lower death rates is highly significant," Figueiredo said in a Cedars-Sinai news release.

At the same time, while patients who began taking aspirin after their [cancer diagnosis](#) had better outcomes than those who didn't take aspirin, the difference was not significant, the study found.

"These findings may provide an inexpensive lifestyle option to people seeking to prevent [colorectal cancer](#), or to improve their prognoses if they are diagnosed," Figueiredo said.

She noted that ongoing clinical trials are examining how aspirin use before and after a diagnosis of colon or rectal cancer affects survival.

"We have to wait until those results come out," Figueiredo said. "There are potential harms associated with aspirin use." Daily use may increase the risk of allergic reactions and internal bleeding.

"There really needs to be a conversation between clinicians and patients about both the risks and benefits," Figueiredo said. "These studies and our results really add to that conversation."

The findings were recently published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

Colon and rectal cancers are the third-leading cause of U.S. cancer deaths, contributing to an estimated 53,000 deaths last year.

About 104,600 cases of colon cancer and 43,300 cases of rectal [cancer](#) were diagnosed in the United States last year, according to the American Cancer Society.

More information: The American Cancer Society has more on [colon and rectal cancers](#).

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