

# Aspirin may be key to combat some cancers

## THREE-YEAR STUDY

BY DEENA BEASLEY

**SAN FRANCISCO** - Anti-inflammatory drugs like low-dose aspirin, already used to protect against heart disease, may help prevent some kinds of cancer in people at high risk of developing the disease, researchers say.

"We've been focusing on a cure for invasive cancer for several decades, but it's a tough nut to crack. We've come to realize that cancer is like heart disease or diabetes - it takes 20 or 30 years to develop," Dr. Joyce O'Shaughnessy, co-director of breast cancer research at Baylor-Sammons Cancer Center in Dallas, said at a meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research.

People with pre-cancerous conditions - like benign colon polyps - have a 25% to 50% chance of developing metastatic cancer, or cancer that spreads to vital organs and is eventually fatal, she said.

"Pre-cancer is cancer in evolution. Like high blood pressure or high cholesterol, it should be treated early," said Dr. Gary Kelloff.

Just five drugs are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as cancer-prevention treatments, including the breast cancer drug Tamoxifen and the arthritis drug Celebrex, found to inhibit a rare type of inherited colon cancer.

Pre-cancer is mainly treated with surgery - cervical cells are removed after an abnormal pap smear or colon polyps when they are found by a colonoscopy, but surgery is not foolproof, can be disfiguring and often has to be repeated, Dr. Kelloff said.

A three-year study of 1,121 people with benign colon tumors, called adenomas, showed that a daily low-dose, or "baby," aspirin cut their risk of developing more tumors by 19%, according to Dr. John Baron, professor of medicine at Dartmouth Medical School in Lebanon, N.H., and an author of the study. The risk reduction, compared to patients on placebo, rose to 40% for participants on the 80 mg baby aspirin who had a more aggressive type of adenoma, he said. The study tracked patients who took a regular, 325 mg, aspirin daily, but they showed no significant benefit. It was not clear why the higher-dose aspirin was less effective.

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Rebound Health

2463 East Hastings  
Vancouver, BC V5K 1Y8  
604-255-1000