

[IMAGE]

Anti-Inflammatory Arthritis Drugs: Bad for the Heart?

If you watch any television at all you've probably seen the commercials for Vioxx or Celebrex, two extremely popular arthritis drugs. Millions of Americans take these drugs to reduce arthritis and joint pain. These drugs, classified as cyclooxygenase 2 (COX-2) inhibitors, are a second generation of anti-inflammatory drugs that have gained popularity, in part because they do not cause digestive problems, unlike their predecessors. However, new research shows that COX-2 inhibitors may increase your risk of developing a cardiovascular disease.

The cardiovascular effects of COX-2 inhibitors were evaluated in a review of multiple studies published in the August 22 edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. This review focused on two major studies in particular, each with over 8,000 participants: the Vioxx Gastrointestinal Outcomes Research Study (VIGOR) and the Celecoxib Long-term Arthritis Safety Study (CLASS). VIGOR showed that Vioxx increased the risk of cardiovascular events, such as heart attack or stroke, almost two-and-a-half times. Two other smaller studies also suggested a relationship between Vioxx and these conditions. CLASS indicated an increased risk for cardiovascular events in COX-2 users, but was inconclusive because of minimal data.

If you currently use either of these drugs, it's especially important to monitor potential adverse changes to your heart. If possible, find alternative ways to deal with arthritis pain. Finally, if you have not developed arthritis pain, do your best to avoid it by maintaining a balanced diet, taking vitamin supplements, and staying active. Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of any drug before you fill that prescription!

Reference:

Mukherjee D, Nissen SE, Topol EJ. Risk of cardiovascular events associated with selective COX-2 inhibitors. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, August 22/29, 2001;286(8), pp. 954-959.

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