

# Painkillers raise blood pressure in women-US study

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By Maggie Fox, Health and Science Correspondent

**WASHINGTON, Aug 15 (Reuters)** - Women who take higher doses of common, over-the-counter painkillers such as ibuprofen and even Tylenol have higher blood pressure than women who do not, U.S. researchers reported on Monday.

Only aspirin did not raise the risk of high blood pressure among the women, who were followed for three to four years to see which ones developed high blood pressure.

The researchers said their findings, published in the journal Hypertension, add to a growing list of research that suggests all painkillers, prescription and non-prescription, carry health risks and should be used carefully.

This includes acetaminophen or paracetamol, sold by Johnson & Johnson Co. <JNJ.N> under the brand name Tylenol.

"In our study, women who took 500 milligrams (mg) or more of acetaminophen per day, on average, were about twice as likely to develop high blood pressure as women who did not use acetaminophen," said Dr. John Phillip Forman of Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, who led the study.

"In addition, older women, ages 51 to 77, who used an average of 400 mg or more per day of ibuprofen were about 80 percent more likely to develop high blood pressure compared to older women who did not use this drug," Forman added in a statement.

"Younger women, ages 34 to 53, who used more than 400 mg a day of ibuprofen had a 60 percent higher chance of developing high blood pressure."

For their study, Forman and colleagues studied one group of 1,903 women aged 51 to 77 and a second group of younger women aged between 34 and 53. The women did not have high blood pressure then the studies began but were regularly questioned about various aspects of their health and lifestyle, including what drugs they took, and watched.

The study is especially important as prescription drugs called COX-2 inhibitors have also been shown to raise the risk of blood pressure, stroke and heart attack. Patients were turning to over-the-counter alternatives, despite evidence that these can cause gastrointestinal bleeding and can also raise blood pressure.

## AWARENESS OF RISKS

"I am not advocating that these medications be abandoned. People with chronic pain need to be able to treat their pain," Forman asked in a telephone interview.

"But probably most people go in and see them on the shelf and think they have no risks and that they are completely safe because they are available without a prescription."

The findings held whether women used the drugs for headache, arthritis or other aches and pains. They could explain why high blood pressure, which itself raises the risk of stroke, heart attack and heart failure, is so common in the United States.

While aspirin has been shown to prevent heart disease, the research is murkier on the other drugs, known as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or NSAIDs. Acetaminophen was not believed to affect heart risk either way.

But Forman's team noted that acetaminophen and NSAIDs can affect endothelial function -- altering the healthy workings of the linings of blood vessels.

NSAIDs, except for aspirin, do this by affecting compounds produced in the body called prostaglandins.

"Although aspirin also inhibits prostaglandin synthesis, it has not been associated with endothelial dysfunction. On the contrary, aspirin may improve endothelial function, as has been documented in patients with atherosclerosis," the researchers wrote.