**Taking ibuprofen could raise heart risk by a fifth: Long term use of the painkiller causes chemical reaction that puts strain on the organ**

* **Painkillers may trigger a heart condition that affects almost a million Brits**
* **Heart failure up to 20 per cent more likely to develop in regular pill takers**
* **The study published in the journal BMJ Open involved ten million patients**

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Ibuprofen and other painkillers may trigger a heart condition which affects almost a million Britons, a major study has shown.

Patients who regularly take the pills are up to 20 per cent more likely to develop heart failure.

Long-term use of the medication causes chemical reactions in the body which place extra strain on the heart, research suggests.

This can lead to heart failure in patients who have a history of previous heart attacks or high blood pressure. An estimated 900,000 adults in Britain have heart failure which occurs when the muscle becomes too weak to pump blood around the body.

It causes extreme tiredness, breathlessness and swelling of the legs and is a long-term condition that can’t be cured.

The study published in the journal BMJ Open involved ten million patients from the UK, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany.

Those prescribed painkillers known as Non-Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) – which includes ibuprofen – were 20 per cent more likely on average to be admitted to hospital with heart failure. The findings showed ibuprofen increased the risk of heart failure by 18 per cent if taken regularly.

Diclofenac, used for arthritis, raised the likelihood by 19 per cent and Ketorolac, a less common drug, increased it by 83 per cent.

And for those who took NSAIDs daily for a year or more the risk almost doubled compared to if they were not taking them at all.

Lead author Dr Giovanni Corrao, from the University of Milano-Bicocca in Italy said these types of painkillers were being ‘inappropriately overused’.

The pills are commonly taken by the elderly for long-term conditions such as arthritis and other muscular pain. But these are the patients who are also at the highest risk of heart failure, and may have previously suffered heart attacks.

Professor Peter Weissberg, medical director of the British Heart Foundation, said: ‘Since heart and joint problems often coexist, particularly in the elderly, this study serves as a reminder to doctors to consider carefully how they prescribe NSAIDs. And to patients, that they should only take the lowest effective dose for the shortest possible time.

‘They should discuss their treatment with their GP if they have any concerns. It has been known for some years now that such drugs need to be used with caution in patients with, or at high risk of, heart disease.

‘This applies mostly to those who take them on a daily basis rather than only occasionally.’

Dr Tim Chico, an expert in cardiovascular medicine at the University of Sheffield, also said the risk was low for patients who only took NSAIDs occasionally and had no previous risk of heart attacks. In July the American Heart Association urged doctors to check patients were not taking ibuprofen or similar painkillers for long periods of time over concerns of their links to heart failure.

The organisation is one of the largest and most influential in the world and their recommendations have been closely heeded by doctors in the UK.

Helen Williams, consultant pharmacist for cardiovascular disease at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said the most commonly used drugs posed the lowest risk.

She said: ‘The NHS has moved away from more potent NSAIDs because of the established increased risk of heart attacks and strokes with these medicines.’

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