Ibuprofen link to heart failure: Over-the-counter painkillers raise risk by almost 20%

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MILLIONS of Britons taking powerful painkillers could be at risk of heart failure, a major study claims.

Research suggests that common anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen increase the chance of the potentially fatal condition by almost 20 per cent.

Patients on some of the most frequently prescribed painkillers have been warned to take the lowest effective dose and try to limit the length of time on the medicine.

The fresh health warning over the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) comes after analysis involving almost 10 million patients.

Experts said their findings showed it was also wrong for people to assume over-the-counter painkillers were 'harmless and safe for everyone'.

The review, in the British Medical Journal, said: “The risk of hospital admission for [heart failure](http://www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/715687/heart-disease-risk-higher-job-Bupa-scheme) associated with current use of NSAIDs appears to vary between individual [drugs]. Risk of admission is doubled for some used at very high doses.”

NSAIDs are a group of drugs taken by patients suffering joint problems, back complaints and arthritis.

They are prescribed to relieve pain, reduce inflammation and quell fever. Although they are used by millions the NHS warned the drugs are not suitable for everyone and can 'sometimes cause side-effects'.

Professor Peter Weissberg, of the British Heart Foundation, said: “It has been known for some years that such drugs need to be used with caution in patients with, or at high risk of, heart disease.

**The risk of hospital admission for heart failure associated with current use of NSAIDs appears to vary between individuals**

British Medical Journal

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

"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.”

Researchers at the University of Milano-Bicocca, in Italy, found current use of any NSAID was associated with a raised risk compared with past use.

Although this was an observational study, researchers said the findings suggest risk appears to vary between drugs and according to dosage.

Natural remedies to relieve a headache

Experts said: “Even a small increase in cardiovascular risk is a concern for public health."

Dr Tim Chico, Reader in Cardiovascular Medicine at the University of Sheffield, said heart failure is caused by a wide range of conditions including [blood pressure,](http://www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/681886/blood-pressure-systolic-diastolic-blood-flow-heart-arteries????????) heart attacks, drinking too much alcohol and obesity.   
  
He added: “It seems unlikely that NSAIDs would cause problems in people with otherwise healthy hearts, but they may unmask heart failure due to these other causes.”

A total of 27 individual NSAIDs were included in the analysis on patients aged 18 and over in the UK, Holland, Germany and Italy between 2000 and 2010.

Overall 92,163 hospital admissions for heart failure were identified and matched with 8,246,403 control patients.

Current use of any NSAID was found to be associated with a 19 per cent increase in the risk of hospital admission for heart failure.

Helen Williams, consultant pharmacist at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said: “The link between use of NSAIDs and increased risk of heart failure is well-established.

“People regularly purchasing NSAIDs over the counter, such as ibuprofen, should seek advice from their pharmacist or doctor. People needing treatment with long-term or frequent short courses should be regularly assessed.”

Heart failure is caused by a wide range of conditions, including high blood pressure, heart attacks and obesity.

Painkiller warning: [Are YOU ignoring guidance on THESE addictive drugs?](http://www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/713281/painkillers-addiction-ignoring-NICE-guidance)