Taking ibuprofen for just a week can increase your risk of heart attack by 50%

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Taking over-the-counter painkillers such as ibuprofen for just a week can increase the risk of a heart attack by up to 50 per cent, experts warn.

The risks and benefits of ibuprofen (pictured), diclofenac, celecoxib, and naproxen should be weighed up by doctors following the publication of the findings in the BMJ, they said.

Those who use commonly prescribed non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, also known as NSAIDs, to treat pain or inflammation could be raising their risk of a heart attack, as early as in the first week of use and especially within the first month of taking high doses.

Researchers analysed the records of more than 446,000 people from studies of various healthcare databases, including those from Canada, Finland and Britain, of whom 61,460 had suffered a heart attack.

Taking any dose of NSAIDs for one week, one month, or more than a month was associated with an increased risk of heart attack.

Naproxen was associated with the same risk as that documented for other NSAIDs. With celecoxib, the risk was lower than for rofecoxib, also known as Vioxx, and was comparable to that of traditional NSAIDs.

Overall the increase in risk is about 20 to 50 per cent if using NSAIDs compared with not using the medications. That means the risk due to NSAIDs is on average about one per cent annually.

The study concluded with more than 90 per cent probability that all NSAIDs studied are associated with a heightened risk of heart attack, University of Montreal said.