

EM9705: The Globe and Mail, July 2, 1997, page A3

# ASA helps heart but hurts brain

Chance of stroke tends to go up as heart-attack risk diminishes

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MONTREAL – Regular use of ASA can reduce the risk of dying from a heart attack, but for some people this benefit can be wiped out by a higher risk of stroke, researchers warned yesterday.

The daily use of acetylsalicylic acid to thin the blood reduces the risk of having a fatal heart attack by about 15 per cent, yet in people of Asian descent and those with chronic high blood pressure, the risk of stroke caused by a hemorrhage in the brain is increased by as much as 78 per cent, according to a review of published studies.

These are tradeoffs that have to be calculated, said Dr. Jiang He, part of a research team from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore that did the meta-analysis, a combination of

study results that can reveal trends that do not become apparent in smaller samples.

"Overall, there is still a benefit from reduction of cardiovascular disease, even for people who are hypertensive but maintain low cholesterol," Dr. He said yesterday at the International Conference on Preventive Cardiology, a meeting of 2,500 heart specialists.

He pointed out that while only about 20 per cent of all strokes, which occur when blood can't flow to the brain, are caused by hemorrhage, racial descent and medical history can raise your odds.

"It is especially important to people of Chinese descent," Dr. He said. In China, the rate of stroke from hemorrhage is higher than the rate of heart attack.

The Johns Hopkins review included 17 clinical trials that included a total of 57,393

patients.

ASA is one of the most widely used of all drugs and is routinely taken in doses of from 325 mg to 1000 mg by people with heart disease risk factors such as a buildup of plaque on the inside of blood vessels. Its effect is to thin the blood so that it can flow better through the constrictions.

Stroke risk increases with age. According to statistics released yesterday by the Heart and Stroke Foundation, stroke is responsible for 5.9 per cent of all heart-related deaths of men and 9 per cent of women in Canada each year. Many thousands of strokes each year leave people crippled and unable to care for themselves. Most strokes occur after the age of 65.

In another study reported yesterday, researchers said that smoking adds more risk of stroke than any other activity or medical condition.

The article EM9705 reprinted above is used in Chapter 10 of the STAT 231 Course Materials.