

Up to 20% of asthma is aspirin-induced

Asthma is becoming an increasing health problem around the world and experts point to everything from pollution to weakened immune systems as causes. But, for 10-20% of the 15 million U.S. asthma sufferers, the condition is actually induced by using aspirin, according to an article in the journal *Chest*, the publication of the American College of Chest Physicians.

In the report, researchers noted that attacks of aspirin-induced asthma are often triggered by taking small amounts of aspirin or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Within 20 minutes to three hours, patients experience nasal congestion in the upper airway, inflammation in the lower airway, runny eyes, and skin eruptions. Nasal polyps, usually benign nodules in the mucous membrane of the nose, can also be present.

Since asthma is an inflammatory condition of the airways, exposure to aspirin or NSAIDs in certain individuals appears temporarily to worsen the inflammatory process. The attack is similar to an immediate hypersensitivity reaction, which sometimes can be serious -- possibly fatal.

"Fifty percent of the patients who have aspirin-induced asthma have chronic, severe, corticosteroid-dependent asthma," said K. Suresh Babu, M.D., lead researcher.

According to Dr. Babu, chronic persistent inflammation is the hallmark of patients with aspirin-induced asthma. Typically, the problem begins after a viral infection. The symptoms usually start after 10 years of age and peak during the patient's 30s.

Aspirin was invented by a German chemist, Felix Hoffmann, 100 years ago as a treatment for his father's arthritis. Since then, aspirin has become one of the most widely ingested chemical compounds -- with some 80 billion tablets consumed each year in the United States alone.

It has been implicated in a number of other health risks, including gastric bleeding, ulcers, acid reflux disease, brain hemorrhage, and stroke.

SOURCE: *Chest*, November 2000.