

Simple low-dose aspirin may boost ovarian cancer survival

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Credit: QIMR

New QIMR Berghofer research has found that low-dose aspirin may improve ovarian cancer survival.

The study followed more than 900 Australian women newly-diagnosed with [ovarian cancer](#), and asked them how often they used [nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs](#) (NSAIDs) such as aspirin.

Lead researcher Dr. Azam Majidi said the women who reported taking

NSAIDs at least four days a week in the 12 months after diagnosis, lived longer on average than occasional or non-users. Most of the frequent users were taking daily [low-dose aspirin](#).

"Our findings suggest that frequent NSAID use might improve survival for women with ovarian cancer, regardless of whether they start taking the drugs before or after diagnosis," Dr. Majidi said.

"We found the difference would translate to an average of an extra 2.5 months' survival in the five years post-diagnosis. While this might not sound like a lot, it is significant for ovarian cancer. The disease is often diagnosed at an [advanced stage](#) when the prognosis is poor, and [treatment options](#) are limited."

Ovarian cancer can be hard to detect and usually isn't discovered until stages three or four, when the five-year survival rate is just 29%. It is Australia's deadliest gynecological cancer.

Up to 80% of women experience recurrence of the cancer after treatment. However, the QIMR Berghofer study suggested that in those who frequently used NSAIDs, the cancer did not come back as quickly.

Dr. Majidi said the findings offer hope that low-dose aspirin may help ovarian cancer survival at a population-wide level, while researchers continue to search for better therapies. However, she also stressed that aspirin is not safe for everyone so women should not start taking the drugs without consulting their doctor.

"One of the exciting things about these results is that low-dose aspirin is affordable and relatively safe for use at a population-wide level," she said.

"While more targeted and advanced treatments show great promise, at

the moment they are very expensive and not accessible to everyone—especially in [poorer countries](#)."

"More research including [clinical trials](#) is needed to confirm whether these drugs can improve survival for women affected by this terrible disease."

The study, published in *JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, is not the first to suggest a link between NSAIDs and ovarian cancer survival. However, some previous studies may have been affected by methodological problems, which this latest research sought to address.

It was made possible by the world-first Ovarian Cancer Prognosis and Lifestyle (OPAL) study, set up by Professor Penny Webb in 2012 to investigate lifestyle factors which may improve survival and quality of life for women with ovarian cancer.

More than 900 newly diagnosed Australian women signed up to the OPAL study, which aims to deliver advice to future patients on [lifestyle changes](#) that can help beat the disease.

More information: Azam Majidi et al, Common analgesics and ovarian cancer survival: the Ovarian cancer Prognosis And Lifestyle (OPAL) Study, *JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/jnci/djac239](https://doi.org/10.1093/jnci/djac239)

Provided by QIMR Berghofer

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