An Aspirin a Day Might Keep Cervical Cancer at Bay

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An ordinary household drug might help prevent cervical cancer in women living with HIV and HPV (human papillomavirus, a primary cause of the cancer)—especially in developing nations.

Research in Haiti found that high levels of an enzyme called COX-2 and its byproduct PGE-M were linked to cervical cancer. The inflammation caused by HIV raises levels of COX-2, which could be one reason women living with HIV have a high risk of cervical cancer.

Enter (possibly) aspirin, which blocks COX-2. In theory, taking one aspirin daily might help HIV-positive women suppress COX-2 and improve their chances of avoiding cervical cancer. The researchers are pushing for trials to test the idea.

If it works, could this approach be useful in countries with widely available cervical screening and treatment, like the United States? “[That would] require a careful assessment of risk and benefit,” Andrew Dannenberg, MD, of Weill Cornell Medical College and an author of the study, tells POZ. “Remember,” he adds, “that aspirin can have side effects including ulcer disease.”

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