Common Diabetes Drug May Reduce Risk of Kidney Failure

Canagliflozin was also found to prevent cardiovascular death, heart attack and stroke in those with the blood sugar disorder.

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Diabetes is considered a major cause of kidney failure. But canagliflozin (Invokana), a common drug used to reduce glucose levels in people with type 2 diabetes, has been found to lower the risk of kidney failure among people with the blood sugar disorder, according to new findings published in The New England Journal of Medicine, CNN reports.

For the study, researchers recruited 4,401 patients age 30 and older with type 2 diabetes and chronic kidney disease. Scientists randomly assigned participants to receive either canagliflozin or a placebo across 690 sites in 34 countries from March 2014 through May 2017. Next, investigators monitored canagliflozin's effects on patients at three, 13 and 26 weeks.

Results showed that those who took canagliflozin reduced their risk of death from renal causes by 34 percent and their risk of end-stage kidney disease by 32 percent. In addition, those who took canagliflozin, experienced a decrease in their risk of cardiovascular death, heart attack, stroke and hospitalization for heart failure. (Based on this information, researchers speculated that canagliflozin could potentially prevent 22 hospitalizations for heart failure and 25 composite events of cardiovascular death, heart attack or stroke among 1,000 patients.)

But several harmful outcomes were associated with canagliflozin as well, including a spike in the risk of a lower limb amputation, bone fracture and diabetic ketoacidosis, a serious complication from diabetes that occurs when the body breaks down fat too quickly.

"We're still not exactly sure what the mechanisms are that cause these heart and kidney benefits, but they are clearly not solely due to lowering the blood sugar level," said Mark E. Molitch, MD, a professor of endocrinology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago who was not involved in the study but often prescribes canagliflozin to his patients.

"So on the basis of this study," he concluded, "we might use canagliflozin just for kidney benefits and possibly heart benefits while using other drugs to control glucose levels in patients with diabetes and kidney disease."

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