

Aspirin-like Drug Could Help Control Diabetes

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Researchers at the Tulane University School of Medicine are participating in a national study testing the ability of a generic drug called salsalate to control diabetes.



Dr. Vivian Fonseca, an endocrinologist and national authority on diabetes, is leading the Tulane team that is testing the generic drug salsalate for control of the disease. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The multi-site study is led by the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston, with 17 institutions around the country, including Tulane, involved in clinical testing of the drug. The study's results are published in the March 16 edition of *The Annals of Internal Medicine*.

"Salsalate been prescribed for the joint pain of arthritis for many years," says Dr. Vivian Fonseca, who holds the Tullis-Tulane Alumni Chair in Diabetes, is chief of the endocrinology section and is principal investigator for the study at Tulane. "It is an anti-inflammatory agent that is chemically similar to aspirin, but it is easier on the stomach."

The three-month-long trial, funded by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases of the National Institutes of Health, tracked responses to salsalate by more than 100 individuals aged from 17 to 75 years. Patients who took the drug showed significantly improved blood glucose levels, an indication that salsalate may be beneficial in controlling diabetes.

Fonseca says the study "represents a novel twist to what has been described in the literature for years as a 'side effect' ? this drug can cause low blood sugars in people with diabetes who take it along with other medications."

Similar drugs were used to treat diabetes over a century ago in Germany, he adds. "We have 'rediscovered' the concept but have now applied it in a modern scientific manner in a properly conducted clinical trial."

With continued funding from NIH, the team is initiating a second clinical trial. Volunteers are being recruited for this stage, which will study the efficacy and safety of salsalate in a larger group for a longer period of time. Those interested in participating in the study should call Connie Tompkins at 504-988-4651.