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Common pain and fever medicines might increase vulnerability to COVID-19: Australia study

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Morphine suppresses key cells of the immune system and increases the risk of infection, particularly after cancer surgery

The largest clinical review of immune responses to paracetamol, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and opioid analgesics, with a focus on infectious diseases, has provided insights into unintended impacts of these commonly used medicines. The findings highlight the potential for some of these medicines to join the fight against old and new infectious diseases.

The study revealed that while Paracetamol, Ibuprofen, Aspirin can reduce the desirable immune response when taken for vaccination, aspirin could be an affordable and accessible therapeutic option for tuberculosis which mainly afflicts poor countries, with beneficial results shown in animals and humans.

“Taking paracetamol or ibuprofen before or immediately after vaccination – for example for COVID-19 – to try to prevent mild fever or headache is not recommended, because this could reduce the body’s desirable immune response to the vaccine. For chickenpox, use of ibuprofen is not recommended as it might increase the risk of secondary bacterial skin infections”, said the researchers from Sydney University in Australia.

On the positive side, the findings provide new insights for further research to evaluate these commonly used medicines, which could be repurposed to improve outcomes for people undergoing treatment for infectious diseases.