

FDA to weigh benefits of new baldness pill

WASHINGTON (AP)—Popping a pill to regrow hair? It sounds too good to be true, but balding men may soon get that option.

The Food and Drug Administration's scientific advisers will decide Thursday whether to let Merck & Co. sell the first anti-baldness pill to American men, whose only hope now is to slather Rogaine on their scalps.

Merck's Propecia is a once-a-day pill that promises to help regrow hair—and prevent more from falling out—by suppressing a hormone that shrinks hair follicles.

It's not a miracle cure, cautions Dr. Ronald Savin, a dermatologist in New Haven, Conn., who helped test the drug.

The new hair "is not like anybody ever had when they were 13," Savin said. But "it is an obvious difference. ... I've got to tell you, I've seen the pictures—the before and

after—and it's impressive."

Propecia actually is a lower dose of a popular drug that men already use for enlarged prostates, called Proscar. For the merely hair-impaired, Merck says a safe dose is 1 milligram a day of the active ingredient, finasteride, not the 5-milligram Proscar pills that prostate patients take.

And although women suffer hair loss, too, Merck says Propecia can never be used by them—the threat of birth defects is too great. Doctors even tell women not to touch the pills for fear the drug could be absorbed through their skin.

Some 40 million American men suffer hair loss. Until now, their only option was Rogaine, a non-prescription drug sold in the shampoo aisle. It helps about 25 percent of users grow back moderate amounts of hair, but stop using it and the balding resumes.

Merck on Thursday will show the FDA's scientific advisers studies of 1,553 men that found 86 percent of those who took Propecia grew more hair or maintained the amount they had, compared with just 42 percent of men who took a dummy pill.

More significant to Savin was that Propecia helped preserve what hair men had left, even if they didn't grow any more.

He said investigators spent two years counting the hairs in specific sections of men's scalps, and those who didn't get Propecia treatment lost 2.5 percent of their hair every year, while hair counts were stable for the treated men.

But the big question for the FDA panel, whose advice the government typically follows, is whether using a pill that affects hormones is safe for a simply cosmetic problem.

Merck says side effects included decreased libido and impo-

tence in 2 percent of the men who took Propecia, a number the company will portray as insignificant, particularly because 1.3 percent of men who took a dummy pill reported the same problems.

Propecia works by blocking production of a testosterone-related hormone called dihydrotestosterone, or DHT, that causes hair loss.

Scientists knew to investigate the drug because studies of a group of related men in the Dominican Republic who naturally have very low concentrations of DHT never go bald, Savin explained.

While Propecia can cut men's DHT levels by 60 percent, nobody knows how today's balding drug, Rogaine, actually works. But it's not hormonal, and it is applied directly to the scalp, leading Savin to predict that men may one day try using the two drugs together to see if they get a better effect.

Studies reveal potential of drug combos for asthmatics

(AP)—Modest doses of inhaled steroids combined with other drugs control asthma as well as or better than high doses of steroids, while reducing the risk of side effects from long-term use, two studies found.

Steroids reduce the frequency of asthma attacks. But daily use over a few years has been linked to osteoporosis and cataracts in older adults and slowed growth in children. And the effects over decades of use are unknown because the drugs are so new.

Two studies published in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine looked at drug combinations that might allow asthma sufferers to get by with lower doses of steroids.

"Taking two medications in modest quantities seems to improve control of the disease while reducing the possible long-term side effects," said Dr. Gilbert D'Alonzo, a professor of medicine at Temple University in Philadelphia who was not involved in either study.

Asthma afflicts 14 million to 15 million Americans, causing thousands of emergency hospitalizations and killing more than 5,000 people a year.

Inhaled steroids—the first-line approach to treating moderate or severe asthma—reduce the chronic lung inflammation that makes it hard for patients to breathe.

One of the studies looked at formoterol, an inhaled airway-relaxing type of drug known as a long-acting beta-2-agonist, in combination with the inhaled steroid budesonide. The study, led by Dr. Romain Pauwels at University Hospital in Ghent, Belgium, involved 852 patients ages 17 to 70 at hospitals in Europe and Canada.

After a year of treatment, patients getting formoterol and low doses of budesonide had fewer symptoms, better lung function and more asthma attack-free days than those getting moderate doses of budesonide alone. However, the higher dose of budesonide was more effective at preventing the most severe asthma attacks.

The combination of formoterol and a moderate dose of budesonide proved to be the best treatment of all.

HEALTH TIPS

A flu shot from the A.P. Beutel Health Center can help students stay healthy and not miss tests or classes.

Influenza, called the flu, is an upper respiratory infection which can cause fever, chills, cough, headache, sore throat and muscle aches. The flu is common in the United States from December to April.

Sharon Davila, R.N.B.S. with Nursing Services at the health center, said the influenza vaccine is important because many students go to classes sick with the flu.

"While the vaccine does not guarantee that you won't get the flu, even if you do get sick, your illness will be milder," she said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that college students should be vaccinated in order to prevent outbreaks of the flu. It

is especially important that anyone with diabetes, asthma, anemia, lung disease, kidney disease or heart disease and any woman more than three months pregnant get the shot.

It is best to get the vaccine between September and mid-November because it takes one to two weeks before the vaccine begins to protect the body. The vaccine offers protection for one year.

The A.P. Beutel Health Center is offering flu shots to students, faculty and staff. The shot costs \$7 for students and \$13 for faculty and staff. The shots are available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and an appointment is not necessary.

Contributed by Margaret Griffith, health education coordinator at the A.P. Beutel Health Center

Researchers: Cholesterol-lowering drugs impact even healthy middle-aged adults

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP)—For the first time, doctors have shown that cholesterol-lowering drugs can help even healthy middle-aged people with ordinary cholesterol levels reduce their risk of heart trouble by more than one-third.

A major study released Wednesday looked at the use of these drugs among men and women—mostly in their 40s, 50s and 60s—whose total cholesterol levels were around 220. A reading of 220 is considered somewhat higher than ideal but is average for American adults.

Researchers said the findings mean that cholesterol medicines should be considered for an additional 8 million Americans who until now would not have been thought to need this treatment. These drugs typically cost about \$100 a month.

The study, conducted on 6,605 men and women, was stopped earlier than planned last summer after researchers found that the treatment significantly reduced the risk of first-time heart attacks and serious chest pain.

The results were released by Dr. Antonio M. Gotto Jr., dean of Cornell University Medical College, at a meeting of the American Heart Association.

The study is the latest to show the power of a 10-year-old class of medicines called statins to protect the heart by lowering cholesterol.

Until now, the drugs have been reserved largely for people with significantly elevated cholesterol or those who clearly have heart disease already. In these people, cholesterol-lowering drugs have been shown to reduce their risk of heart disease by more than one-third.

The study was conducted at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio and the University of North Texas Health Sciences Center in Fort Worth on men and women who are considered very healthy and at low risk for heart problems. Men between 45 and 73 and women between 55 and 73 were put on diet and exercise programs and randomly assigned to take either Mevacor or dummy pills.

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CHEM 101	8-10 PM	CH 9	CH 10	CH 11
PHYS 201	10 PM-MID	CH 14, 15	CH 16, 17	CH 18
MATH 151	9-11 PM	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3
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