

Heart Disease: Aspirin



Aspirin is often used to relieve aches and pains. It also can prevent a heart attack or a stroke.

And if you take it during a heart attack, it can help make your heart attack less severe.

Your doctor may suggest that you take an aspirin every day.

How does aspirin help?

Blood clots can cause heart attacks and strokes.

Aspirin helps prevent heart attack and stroke by changing how the blood clots. It slows clotting and helps prevent blood clots. It can also decrease the size of a forming blood clot.

Your doctor will tell you what dose of aspirin to take and how often to take it. One daily low-dose aspirin (81 mg) is the most common dose used to prevent a heart attack or a stroke.

Take aspirin with food if it bothers your stomach.

- If you think you are having a heart attack, **call 911**. The operator may tell you to chew 1 adult-strength or 2 to 4 low-dose aspirin.

- If you think you are having a stroke, **call 911**, but do **not** take aspirin. Not all strokes are caused by clots. Aspirin could make some strokes worse.

Who should take aspirin?

Your doctor may recommend an aspirin a day if the benefits outweigh the risks of taking aspirin.

If you have a high risk for a heart attack or stroke, aspirin will have even more benefit for you.

Aspirin might be right for you if you:

- Have had a heart attack, stroke, or transient ischemic attack (TIA).
- Have heart disease or have certain risk factors for a heart attack or stroke, such as diabetes or smoking.
- Have had bypass surgery or angioplasty.

Who should NOT take aspirin?

Daily aspirin is not right for everyone.

Don't take aspirin if you:

- Have a stomach ulcer.
- Have recently had a stroke caused by bleeding in the brain.
- Have asthma that is made worse by aspirin.
- Have a low risk of heart attack or stroke.
- Are allergic to aspirin.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of aspirin include:

- A sore and upset stomach (gastritis).

- Bleeding inside your body.
- An allergic reaction.

Tell your doctor if you notice that you bruise easily, have bloody or black stools, or bleed for a long time from cuts or scrapes.

If you plan to stop your medicine, talk with your doctor first about how to do it safely. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.

What to think about

- Drinking 3 or more alcoholic drinks a day while you are taking daily aspirin increases your risk for liver damage and stomach bleeding. If your doctor suggests aspirin, limit or stop your alcohol use.
- You should not take aspirin with some prescription and over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, herbal remedies, and supplements. Talk to your doctor about all the drugs and other remedies you take before starting aspirin.
- Before having a surgery or procedure, tell your doctor or dentist that you take aspirin. He or she will tell you if you should stop taking aspirin beforehand. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do.
- Do not take other pain relievers called NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), such as ibuprofen and naproxen, instead of aspirin. They relieve pain much like aspirin does, but they do not affect blood clotting in the same way. NSAIDs may increase your risk of heart attack.
- Taking an NSAID like ibuprofen on a regular basis may limit aspirin's ability to prevent a heart attack. If you need to take NSAIDs, take the aspirin 2 hours before you take the NSAID.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.