

Aspirin FAQ: Is aspirin right for me?

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WHY SHOULD I TALK TO MY DOCTOR ABOUT DAILY ASPIRIN?

It's a fact. Heart attacks and strokes are the leading causes of death and disability. A simple, low-dose daily aspirin has been shown to prevent a first heart attack or stroke. Asking your healthcare provider about aspirin may help preserve your health.

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AM I A CANDIDATE FOR DAILY ASPIRIN?

Only a healthcare professional can tell you for sure. Speak with your doctor, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant to determine if daily aspirin can help you prevent a first heart attack or stroke. Here are some guidelines that can help you determine if you're a candidate:

- Between the ages of 50-69
- Have not had a bleeding stomach ulcer
- Are not allergic to aspirin
- Are not taking any other clot-preventing medication or daily anti-inflammatory medications

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HOW DOES ASPIRIN PREVENT HEART ATTACKS AND STROKES?

Most heart attacks and strokes are caused by blood clots that occur inside the arteries that supply the heart or brain. Clots can form quickly and clog the flow of blood to these important organs. When heart cells die from not getting enough blood, a heart attack occurs. When brain cells die from not getting enough blood, a stroke occurs. Daily aspirin can help prevent clots from forming and thus lower your risk of first heart attack and stroke.

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DOES LOW-DOSE ASPIRIN HAVE OTHER BENEFITS?

Possibly. There is reason to hope that it may reduce the risk of colon cancer and possibly other malignancies.

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HOW OFTEN SHOULD I TAKE ASPIRIN?

Aspirin works best when taken daily. If you miss a dose, just begin again the next day. It's not important what time you take it as long as it's taken daily.

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IS AN 81 MG ASPIRIN THE RIGHT DOSE FOR ME?

The usual dose to prevent a first heart attack or stroke is 81 mg (low-dose) aspirin. Higher doses (325 mg) of aspirin are also effective, but are associated with slightly increased bleeding risk.

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DOES TAKING ASPIRIN EVERY DAY HAVE RISKS?

Like most things, there can be risks. Because aspirin prevents blood clots, people who use aspirin every day have a slightly higher risk of bruising and bleeding. Bleeding can occasionally be serious – for example, when associated with a stomach ulcer. Very rarely, people may be allergic to aspirin. For these reasons, it's important to ask a healthcare professional if aspirin is right for you.

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IS THERE RESEARCH ADVISING AGAINST ASPIRIN USE?

A low dose of aspirin as a preventative measure is an approach that health organizations, including the American Heart Association, recommend with the advice of a physician. From time to time, there are news headlines that question the use of aspirin as a preventative. Recent media attention, for instance, focused upon two large trials of aspirin use for primary prevention, reported at the European Society of Cardiology. The first trial studied aspirin in individuals without a history of diabetes or previous cardiovascular disease, but at increased risk. Of the 60 percent who took their pills, there was a highly significant reduction in heart attacks and an 18.9 percent reduction in overall cardiovascular disease. The authors emphasized the importance of clinician advice.

The second study involved patients in the United Kingdom who had diabetes mellitus. Serious vascular events including heart attacks, stroke, transient ischemic attacks and cardiovascular death were reduced a statistically significant 12 percent on aspirin compared to the placebo. Concerns were raised regarding side effects but, again, the authors simply recommended healthcare providers be consulted before initiating aspirin therapy.

Results of the studies do not suggest change in the current guidelines for aspirin use in primary prevention of cardiovascular disease, but do underscore the importance of clinician advice.

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WHAT IS ENTERIC-COATED ASPIRIN AND SHOULD I TAKE IT?

Enteric-coated aspirin is layered with a protective coating. This coating stops the pill from dissolving in the stomach and irritating the lining. The pill passes through the stomach and dissolves in the intestines instead. Enteric-coated pills are a good choice for people who are prone to stomach irritation, but can still cause stomach ulcers or bleeding.

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SHOULD I TAKE ASPIRIN IF I TAKE OTHER MEDICATIONS?

Aspirin has been proven safe to take with almost all other medications, including over-the-counter antacids. But, to minimize risk, you should only take daily aspirin if your doctor or another healthcare professional has prescribed it. In general, you shouldn't take aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke when you are using other anti-clotting medications or daily anti-inflammatory medications.

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HOW COMMON IS PREVENTIVE ASPIRIN USE?

It's unknown what percent of Minnesotans take aspirin as a preventative measure, but in a survey published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 52 percent of people at large who were studied said they were using aspirin regularly for primary prevention of disease – 84 percent of them for heart attack prevention and 66 percent for stroke prevention. Most did so as a result of a discussion with a physician.



Ask your doctor if low-dose aspirin is right for you and find out if you're a candidate at AskAboutAspirin.org.