

Benefits of Aspirin



Marshfield Clinic



MINISTRY HEALTH CARE



Two Leaders, One Leading Heart Care Team



Benefits of Aspirin

In addition to its well-known benefits of pain and fever relief, aspirin has been found to be effective in the prevention of heart disease and stroke.



How Does It Help?

Heart attack and stroke occur when one or more of the arteries which carry oxygen-rich blood to the heart or brain are blocked. In many cases this is a result of clots forming from plaque build-up (atherosclerosis) inside the artery. Aspirin has been found to help prevent these clots from developing.

Who Should Use It?

The American Heart Association recommends aspirin use for individuals who have experienced the following events:

- Heart attack (myocardial infarction)
- Unstable angina (chest pain from poor blood supply to the heart)
- Ischemic stroke (caused by clots)
- Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs or “little strokes”)

Studies have shown aspirin therapy helps in the prevention of these events recurring. Also, it has been effective in the prevention of the first occurrence in those individuals who are at high risk because of multiple cardiovascular risk factors. (There is not sufficient evidence to support its benefits for those at low risk.)

You should not start aspirin therapy without first consulting your physician. The risks and benefits vary for each person.

Before deciding if daily aspirin use is right for you, your health care provider will need to consider:

- Your medical and family history
- Your use of other medicines, including prescription and over-the-counter
- Your use of other products, such as dietary supplements, including vitamins and herbals
- Your allergies or sensitivities, and anything that affects your ability to use the medicine
- What you have to gain, or the benefits, from the use of the medicine
- Other options and their risks and benefits
- What side effects you may experience
- What dose, and what directions for use are best for you
- How to know when the medicine is working or not working for this use

Aspirin has a long track record of safe use. As with all medications, though, it can have side effects and actually be dangerous to a small number of individuals. Generally, side effects include stomach or small intestine irritation. Symptoms can include stomach ache, heartburn, minor bleeding from the stomach or worsening of ulcers. Coated aspirin may be helpful for this. There is also a very slight risk of a stroke or intestinal bleeding.

These side effects and risks are very low with the smallest dose. For those with cardiovascular (heart and blood vessels) disease, the potential benefit may far outweigh the risk. Of course, discuss this with your primary health care provider before taking it.

What Dosage Should I Take?

According to the American Heart Association, the daily dosage ranges between a baby aspirin and adult-strength, 81-325 mg. The recommended daily dose is 81-162 mg (standard adult-strength is 325 mg). Higher doses don't have additional benefits and may cause more side effects.

Tell Your Health Care Provider

If you must undergo even a simple surgical procedure or dental extraction, you must tell the surgeon or dentist that you take aspirin.

Should I Take Aspirin During a Heart Attack or Stroke?

The first, and most important, thing to do if you are experiencing heart attack symptoms is to **CALL 911**.

It is critical to get to an Emergency Department as soon as possible. After that, if you have aspirin readily available, take one adult strength (325 mg) **or** four baby (324 mg) aspirin as recommended by emergency medical professionals. Research has shown that use of aspirin, along with other treatment in the early stages of a heart attack, can significantly improve chances of survival.

Taking aspirin **is not** advised during a stroke, because even though clots cause most strokes, some can be caused by a

ruptured blood vessel. Aspirin could potentially make this type of stroke worse.

OF COURSE, NEVER TAKE ASPIRIN UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES IF YOU ARE ALLERGIC TO IT!

Is Aspirin Enough?

Absolutely not! Individuals who have cardiovascular disease should maintain a heart healthy diet, get regular exercise, treat high blood pressure, keep cholesterol at an optimal level and quit smoking.

For more information on the Marshfield Clinic and Ministry Health Care heart care team, ask your health care provider or visit www.oneheartcareteam.org.

References:

American Heart Association
FDA Center for Drug
Evaluation and Research

