

Aspirin and Heart Disease

Why is aspirin important?

Aspirin may reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. Several things increase your risk for a heart attack:

- age over 45 for men and over 55 for women
- diabetes
- kidney disease
- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol
- smoking
- family history of early heart disease or stroke.

If you have several risk factors for heart attack, a daily dose of aspirin can prevent or delay heart attacks and small strokes. If you have already had a heart attack or stroke, you should take 1 aspirin a day to reduce the risk of dying. Talk with your MCNT healthcare provider about this. You should take daily aspirin only if your healthcare provider approves.

If you are at low risk (under the above ages, normal blood pressure, good cholesterol level, no diabetes or kidney disease), an aspirin a day does not change the risk of dying. People who have high blood pressure that is poorly controlled or who have problems with internal bleeding might have more problems with aspirin. Talk to your MCNT healthcare provider about the risks and benefits of taking aspirin.

How does aspirin work?

Aspirin affects the way your blood clots. When an artery is narrowed by heart disease, a blood clot can block the artery and cause a heart attack. When you take aspirin, blood is less likely to clot and block a narrowed artery. Aspirin may also be used during a heart attack, while you are recovering from a heart attack, or after heart surgery.

Should everyone take aspirin?

Not everyone should take aspirin regularly. Daily use of aspirin can cause symptoms such as stomach irritation, internal bleeding, and hearing loss. Do not take aspirin unless you first talk with your healthcare provider. This is especially important if you have:

- poorly controlled high blood pressure
- a bleeding disorder
- asthma
- nasal polyps

- stomach or intestinal ulcers
- liver or kidney problems.

What should I watch out for?

Aspirin can cause you to bleed more than normal. Before you have surgery or dental work, tell your healthcare provider or dentist that you are taking aspirin. The tendency to bleed lasts for up to 10 days after you stop taking aspirin.

Aspirin interacts with many other medicines. Check with your MCNT healthcare provider if you are taking other painkillers, such as ibuprofen or naproxen. If your MCNT provider has told you to take aspirin to help prevent a heart attack, you need to know that taking ibuprofen at the same time--for pain relief, for example--may interfere with the benefits of aspirin for the heart. It may be all right to take both of these medicines, but talk with your MCNT healthcare provider about the timing for taking both of them. To avoid the risk of overdose, also tell your provider if you are taking any nonprescription products. Also, do not stop taking any medicines without talking to your MCNT healthcare provider or pharmacist.

Drinking alcohol while you are taking this medicine increases the risk of severe stomach irritation. Ask your provider if you should avoid alcohol while you are taking this medicine.

Be aware of the risk of overdose with aspirin. If you become seriously ill (severe dizziness, confusion, headache, ringing in the ears), contact your healthcare provider right away.

How much aspirin should I take and how often?

The best dose to take is still not known, but to prevent heart disease or stroke the most you should take is 1 adult aspirin (325 mg) per day. In some studies, 1 baby aspirin (81 mg) per day was effective. Talk to your MCNT healthcare provider about the best dose for you.

If you think you might be having a heart attack, call 911. You may take an aspirin after you call 911, unless:

- You are allergic to aspirin.
- Your healthcare provider has told you not to take aspirin because you have a health problem that makes using it too risky.

Do not take aspirin if you have symptoms such as:

- a severe headache with no known cause

- weakness, numbness, or tingling in the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- trouble walking, dizziness, or a loss of balance or coordination
- inability to speak or trouble speaking or understanding what someone else is saying
- trouble seeing with 1 or both eyes, or double vision.

These may be symptoms of a stroke. Aspirin may make some types of stroke worse.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

If you are taking aspirin and you have these side effects, contact your MCNT provider right away:

- severe diarrhea
- blood in your urine
- black stools
- confusion
- nausea or vomiting
- trouble breathing
- vision problems
- severe stomach pain
- severe dizziness
- ringing in your ears.

If you think you are having a heart attack, call 911 right away.