



# ASPIRIN THERAPY

## PREVENTING HEART ATTACKS AND STROKES

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If you are at risk for developing heart disease—or even if you have already had a heart attack—taking an aspirin every day can help keep you healthy. People who take aspirin daily are much less likely to have a heart attack or to die from a heart attack or stroke.

### How does aspirin help with heart disease?

Most people think aspirin is just for aches and pains, but it is also very good for your heart and blood vessels. Aspirin makes the blood cells (called platelets) less sticky, so they don't clump together, form a clot, or stick to the walls of the arteries, making them narrow. While aspirin alone can't prevent heart disease and strokes, it is an important part of your medical treatment.

### What problems could I have taking aspirin?

Most people who take aspirin don't have any problems. Some people do have:

- stomach irritation
- nausea and vomiting
- indigestion and heartburn
- severe hunger
- abdominal pain
- stools that are bloody or black (Black stools suggest bleeding.)

Aspirin can cause more bleeding than usual after surgery or dental work. Your doctor or other health care professional may want you to stop taking your aspirin about one week before you have surgery or dental work. Ask your doctor or dentist when it is safe for you to start back on your aspirin therapy.

### What should I do to reduce the risk of having problems?

- Take aspirin that has been coated to reduce stomach irritation. Look for enteric-coated, low-dose, 81mg aspirin.
- Take aspirin with food.

### Can taking aspirin increase my chances of having a stroke?

Aspirin lowers your risk of stroke if you have heart disease or are at an increased risk for developing heart disease. Although most strokes are caused by a clot, some studies suggest that people who take aspirin regularly may be at slightly greater risk of having a stroke caused by bleeding (hemorrhagic stroke).

### How much aspirin should I take?

The recommended dose is 81 to 325 milligrams (one low-dose or adult-strength tablet) of plain or enteric-coated aspirin once a day with a meal. Do not start taking aspirin daily without first checking with your doctor.

### How do medications fit into my treatment plan?

Although medications are an important part of your treatment plan, they do not take the place of healthy eating, regular physical activity, and stress management.

If your doctor prescribes medications, it's important for you to take them as directed. Don't stop taking them

# Understanding your medications

without talking with your doctor first.

If you are having side effects, your doctor may be able to change the medication or the dosage to prevent them. It's likely that you may need to take this medication for the rest of your life, so work with your doctor to make sure that you are taking the right medication and dose for you.

## What do I need to know about my medications?

Before you leave the clinic, take the time to ask your doctor or member of your health care team about your medications. Ask:

- Why am I taking them?
- How often and how long should I take them?
- Are there any special instructions for taking this medication?
- Should I always take medications at mealtime?
- Are there activities that I should avoid while taking any medication?
- What kind of side effects could I have? What symptoms should I look for?
- How can I avoid side effects?

## How can I remember to take my medications?

We all have a hard time adjusting to new routines in our lives. These tips work for others; maybe they can help you too.

- Make a simple chart and post it in an obvious place where you will see it every day, like the mirror in the bathroom.
- Set your alarm clock, watch, or computer as a reminder.
- Take medications at the same time every day: before bed, at mealtime, or at the beginning of a TV show you watch every day, such as the evening news.
- Use a pillbox with seven sections, one for each day of the week.
- Record your medications on a wallet card or calendar.
- Can you think of others?

## What else could I do to manage my medication?

- Take your medications at the same time every day: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Keep a personal medication record card (wallet card) with you and keep it up-to-date. Include any drug or food allergies that you may have and any over-the-counter or non-prescription medications, herbs, or supplements that you are taking.

- Review your medication record card regularly with your health care professional, including your dentist.
- When you purchase any new medications, including over-the-counter medications, ask the pharmacist to check for any interactions with your current medications.
- Refill your medications at least one to two week(s) before you run out. Refills may be processed by phone, online through our Web site, or in person at the pharmacy. Refills may be delivered to your home by mail at no extra cost.
- If a health care professional recommends it, carry some kind of medical identification like a Medic Alert bracelet. For more information, call 1-888-633-4298, or go to **MedicAlert.org**.

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at **kp.org**.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.