

## **Aspirin, Heart Disease & Stroke**

### **What is the good news About Aspirin?**

Research shows that aspirin can help prevent heart attack, hospitalization for unstable angina and recurrent stroke. The daily dosage usually ranges between a baby aspirin and adult-strength aspirin (75-325 mg.).

The American Heart Association encourages more doctors to recommend aspirin to patients who can benefit from this drug. Despite its benefits, aspirin isn't used as much as it should be to treat heart attack.

Also, the American Heart Association estimates that 5,000 to 10,000 lives could be saved each year if people would take aspirin when they have chest pain or other symptoms of a heart attack.

Because aspirin isn't completely risk free, you and your doctor should discuss using it. Together you should weigh the risks and benefits. Factors that may affect the use of aspirin are ...

- The presence of liver or kidney disease.
- Peptic ulcer.
- Other gastrointestinal disease or bleeding.
- Other bleeding problems.
- Allergy to aspirin.
- Use of alcohol.

### **Aspirin and Heart Disease**

Each year more than a million Americans suffer a heart attack. Nearly 460,000 of them die. In fact, more Americans die of coronary heart disease (including heart attack) than from any other single cause.

A heart attack happens when part of the heart muscle is damaged or dies because its blood supply is reduced or stopped. This usually occurs when blood clot blocks arteries narrowed by a buildup of fat, cholesterol and other substances.

Aspirin helps prevent heart attacks by stopping blood platelets from sticking together. That reduces the chance that clots will form and block arteries.

Besides helping prevent heart attacks, aspirin is also useful during a heart attack. In fact, the American Heart Association recommends taking aspirin (after calling 9-1-1 ) when the warning signs of a heart attack occur. (See the heart attack warning signs at the back of this booklet.) Research shows that taking an aspirin when symptoms start significantly improves chances of survival for people having a heart attack.

The American Heart Association also recommends that heart attack survivors regularly take aspirin. By making it harder for blood clots to form, aspirin helps prevent another heart attack.

## **Aspirin and Stroke**

Each year about 600,000 Americans suffer a stroke. About 158,000 of them die, making stroke our nation's NO.3 killer. Stroke is also a leading cause of disability.

A stroke occurs when an artery bringing blood to the brain becomes clogged or ruptures. When cells in part of the brain are damaged because they don't get enough blood and oxygen, paralysis and problems seeing, feeling, talking and understanding speech can occur. Because strokes can be so devastating, it's important to know the warning signs. They're listed at the back of this booklet.

Aspirin may help prevent a recurrent stroke if you have had a transient ischemic attack (TIA or mini stroke) or ischemic stroke. In fact, the American Heart Association recommends taking aspirin if you've had a TIA or ischemic stroke.

Atrial fibrillation increases the risk of stroke. About 2 million people have this problem. About 15 percent of strokes occur in people with atrial fibrillation.

Atrial fibrillation is a disorder in which the heart's two small upper chambers (the atria) quiver instead of beating effectively. Blood isn't pumped completely out of them when the heart beats, so it pools and clots. A stroke occurs when a blood clot formed in the atria dislodges, enters the circulatory system and eventually lodges in a narrowed artery in the brain. Because aspirin helps keep blood from clotting, it reduces stroke risk for people with this problem.

Taking aspirin during a stroke isn't advised, because not all strokes are caused by blood clots. Most strokes are caused by clots, but ruptured blood vessels cause some - and taking aspirin could actually make these hemorrhagic (bleeding) strokes more severe.

## **What you should do**

Now that you've learned about aspirin, heart attack and stroke, here are the next steps to take.

- Find out if you're at risk for heart attack or stroke.
- If your doctor approves and you decide to start taking aspirin regularly, know the possible side effects. Serious side effects may occur with self-treatment. If you have any side effects, tell your doctor immediately.
- Be sure to tell your doctor about all other medicines, vitamins, etc. that you regularly take. These can affect your need for aspirin or how well it works.
- Review your use of aspirin with your doctor if you're scheduled for surgery (even if it's relatively minor). Aspirin affects clotting and prolongs bleeding. This effect can last for up to 10 days after you've stopped taking it.
- Live a healthy lifestyle. That means don't smoke, control high blood pressure and eat a low-saturated fat, low-cholesterol diet to keep your blood cholesterol within healthy limits. Get regular physical activity (a total of 30 minutes or more 3-4 times per week) and lose weight if you're overweight or obese. Finally, manage diabetes if you have it. Taking aspirin doesn't replace the need for healthy habits.