

After a Heart Attack: Taking an Antiplatelet or a Daily Aspirin

After a heart attack, your doctor may have asked you to take an antiplatelet or a daily aspirin to help prevent another heart attack.

Now this medicine won't make you feel any different.

So it can be hard to understand why it's important to take it.

It might help if you learn how it works.

We all have stuff—like cholesterol and fats—that builds up in our arteries over time.

This "stuff" is called plaque. But sometimes the plaque can break open.

That's when these little things in your blood called platelets arrive on the scene to try to help.

Their job is to stop bleeding—like if you were to get a cut on your finger.

The platelets grab onto the plaque.

And they start sticking together to make a clot, just like with the cut on your finger.

But if that clot blocks the flow of blood in a blood vessel traveling to your heart, your heart won't get enough of the blood and oxygen it needs—which means that cells in your heart muscle may die.

When that happens, it's called a heart attack.

Thinking about a heart attack can be scary.

But taking an antiplatelet medicine or a daily aspirin as your doctor prescribed can help prevent another heart attack.

Now here's how an antiplatelet or daily aspirin may help.

They make your platelets slippery, so when they come to a tear in the plaque, it's much harder for them to stick together to build a clot.

And although antiplatelet medicines and aspirin can prevent clots, they also increase the risk of bleeding.

Your blood might not clot very well when you need it to, like when you have a bloody nose.

And sometimes, the bleeding can be inside your body.

The risk of this happening is low, but it is serious.

So here are some things to watch for.

Call your doctor if you have blood in your urine or stool.

And call if you have a nosebleed or a cut that keeps bleeding after you've put pressure on it for several minutes.

And get emergency help if you cough up or vomit blood, have a sudden, severe headache that is different from any headache you've ever had.

Also, tell all of your doctors, your pharmacist, and your dentist that you're taking antiplatelet medicines or a daily aspirin.

After a Heart Attack: Taking an Antiplatelet or a Daily Aspirin

This will help them make sure all of your other medicines are safe to take with antiplatelets or aspirin.

They also need to know this in case you have a procedure that causes bleeding.

Taking medicines, like an antiplatelet or aspirin, to prevent another heart attack might make you worry.

It can help to know how to take these medicines safely and what problems to watch for.

And remember, by taking them, you're doing something very important for your health.