

# Preventing a Heart Attack or Stroke: How Aspirin May Help

Maybe you've heard that taking a daily aspirin is an option for anyone at risk for a heart attack or stroke.

But taking it isn't right for everyone because aspirin can also cause serious bleeding.

That's why the decision to take aspirin is a decision that's best made with your doctor.

And this video can give you facts to help you discuss your choices with your doctor.

So let's start with why some people take a daily aspirin.

Taking aspirin can help prevent blood clots from forming.

Blood clots can be a problem because they can cause a heart attack if they block a blood vessel in your heart.

And blood clots can cause a stroke if they block a blood vessel in the brain. But let's back up a bit to learn how this can happen.

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 the platelets 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.

Or if the blood clot travels to the brain, your brain won't get enough blood and oxygen, and that part of the brain can start to die.

That's how a stroke happens.

Thinking about a heart attack or stroke can be scary.

That's why it's important to talk to your doctor to decide if taking a daily aspirin is the right choice for you. Now here's how aspirin may help.

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

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And although a daily aspirin can prevent clots, it also increases 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.

If you and your doctor decide together that taking a daily aspirin is right for you, here are things you can do to take aspirin safely.

For example, you'll need to be more careful about falls or other injuries that could cause bleeding.

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 or if you 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 if you're taking aspirin.

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

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

Now you know why and how aspirin can work to prevent a heart attack or stroke.

You and your doctor can decide together if a daily aspirin has more benefits than risks in your plan to care for yourself.