

Prophylactic Aspirin Therapy

Q: “Why does my doctor want me take a baby aspirin everyday? What actually is considered a baby aspirin?”

A “baby aspirin” is referring to 81mg low dose aspirin that can be purchased over-the-counter at your local pharmacy. Patients who have an increased risk of stroke or heart attack, as discussed with their physician, may take a daily dose of aspirin to prevent these events from occurring. It is imperative that risk factors for stroke or heart attack be diagnosed with a health care professional. Therapy must be started and assessed regularly under the discretion of your doctor.

Q: “How does taking an aspirin everyday prevent heart attacks and strokes?”

Aspirin, at low doses, is used to prevent platelets from clumping together to form a blood clot. Blood clots may eventually block the flow of blood through the body possibly leading to a heart attack or stroke.

Q: “Are there any medications, that when taken with aspirin, make it less effective in preventing heart attack or stroke?”

Ibuprofen, an over-the-counter pain reliever and anti-inflammatory, is often used for daily headaches, pain and inflammation, and fever. Many patients do not realize this seemingly harmless medication has the potential to interact with aspirin and other important medications taken on a daily basis.

Q: “What is the interaction between aspirin and ibuprofen and what are the consequences of this interaction?”

The FDA and recent research has warned patients that when aspirin and ibuprofen are taken together, patients may experience a diminished benefit from aspirin. When taken together or closely together, ibuprofen stops aspirin from being able to exert its protective effects. This may result in an increased risk of heart attack or stroke, as aspirin's benefit is being essentially blocked by ibuprofen.

Q; “I take a baby aspirin everyday for my heart, but I sometimes use ibuprofen for headaches and other pain during the day. Do I need to stop taking ibuprofen?”

There are options for patients who wish to use ibuprofen for everyday aches and pains. It is first important that aspirin be taken at the same time everyday. If the need arises to take ibuprofen, it should be taken 30 minutes to two hours after taking aspirin. To be absolutely sure that you are receiving full benefit from the aspirin therapy, some health care professionals may recommend patients wait closer to two hours before ibuprofen administration. Also, aspirin can be taken eight hours after a dose of ibuprofen and still maintain its anti-platelet activity.

Q: “How do I know I’m not taking a medication that contains ibuprofen with my aspirin?”

Ibuprofen is found in over-the-counter products such as Advil™, Motrin™, Midol™, and prescription vicoprofen. Many cough and cold products also contain ibuprofen, therefore do not hesitate to ask your pharmacist or physician for assistance.

Q: “Is there anything other than ibuprofen to take for daily aches and pain that will not interact with aspirin’s protective effect?”

Tylenol™, an over-the-counter pain reliever and fever reducer, can be taken along with aspirin. Commonly known as acetaminophen, Tylenol™ does not interact with aspirin.

Q: “Do any other medications besides ibuprofen block aspirin’s protective effect?”

Other-over-the counter or prescription anti-inflammatory medications have the potential to act similarly to ibuprofen. Talk to you physician, pharmacist, or other health care provider about the dosing of these medications in relation to aspirin. Further research is ongoing.