

# Aspirin

## Information and advice for patients

### *Vascular*

#### **What is aspirin?**

Aspirin is a medication which reduces the 'stickiness' of platelets in your blood (cells that help your blood to clot). In higher doses it is also used for pain relief.

#### **What is the benefit of taking aspirin?**

The benefit of taking aspirin is that it makes the platelets in your blood less sticky. This stops the platelets from sticking to fatty lumps in your arteries and forming a blood clot. If a blood clot forms in an artery in your heart or brain it can cause a heart attack or stroke, so taking aspirin reduces your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

#### **What are the risks of taking aspirin?**

There is a risk you could experience some of the side-effects of aspirin. Possible side-effects include:

- Stomach irritation, bleeding in the stomach or indigestion: These occur in up to 1 in 5 people who take aspirin. To reduce the risk of experiencing these side-effects you should take aspirin with or after food.
- You may also have blood in your vomit if you are sick.
- Shortness of breath or wheezing.
- Bleeding in other parts of your body.

If you experience any of these side effects while taking aspirin please see your GP.

There is also a risk that you could have an allergic reaction to aspirin, but this is rare.

#### **What are the risks of not taking aspirin?**

If you choose not to take aspirin your risk of having a heart attack or stroke will not be reduced.

#### **Are there any alternatives to taking aspirin?**

In some cases, such as if you have severe stomach problems or experience adverse reactions to aspirin you may be offered clopidogrel as an alternative. Clopidogrel works in a similar way to aspirin.

If you are already taking a blood-thinning medicine such as warfarin, you may not need to take aspirin as well but this will be discussed with you individually.

#### **Before taking aspirin**

Before taking this medication please let your doctor or nurse know if you have any medical conditions or if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. You should also inform them of any other medications you are taking.

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Please make sure you read the manufacturer's information leaflet that comes with your aspirin before taking it.

### **How to take aspirin**

Take aspirin with or after food to reduce the risk of it causing stomach problems.

Your hospital doctor, GP or nurse will tell you how much aspirin you need to take. Make sure you only take the dose you have been prescribed and that your medication is not past the expiry date.

Your aspirin will either be:

- **Dispersible** – dissolve this completely in water before taking it.
- **Enteric coated (coated tablet)** – swallow this whole.

You can get a prescription for aspirin from your GP or can purchase aspirin from your local pharmacy. If you buy aspirin from your pharmacy please tell the pharmacist that you need 75mg tablets of aspirin and that you have been told to take aspirin by the hospital.

As long as you do not experience any side-effects, you will need to take aspirin long-term.

If you forget to take a dose of aspirin, miss out the forgotten dose and then continue taking it as normal when your next dose is due; do not take extra to make up for the missed dose. If you take too much aspirin contact your GP or NHS Direct on 111.

### **Precautions**

Please tell any doctors or nurses treating you that you are taking aspirin.

The dose of aspirin you have been given is lower than the dose used to relieve pain, but if you need to take painkillers it is best to take an alternative such as paracetamol.

Before you buy any medicines from a pharmacy please tell the pharmacist you are taking aspirin as some cold and flu medicines and painkillers which you can buy from pharmacies also contain aspirin and it is not advisable to take these.

### **Storing aspirin**

- Store your aspirin in the original packaging.
- Store it in a dry place, at room temperature and out of direct sunlight.
- Keep aspirin out of the sight and reach of children.

### **Symptoms to report**

Please see your GP if you experience any of the following symptoms while taking aspirin:

- Diarrhoea or sickness that isn't getting better
- Stomach pain

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- Blood in your vomit
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing

## Is there anything else I can do to reduce my risk of having a heart attack or stroke?

Although taking aspirin will help reduce your risk of having a heart attack and stroke, there are also things that you can do to reduce your risk further:

- If you are overweight or obese lose weight; even a moderate amount of weight-loss will help.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet.
- Take regular exercise.
- If you are a smoker stop smoking.
- If you have high blood pressure make sure this is treated.
- If you are diabetic make sure your blood sugar is well controlled.

## Further information

If you need more information, experience any side effects or have any concerns about taking aspirin please speak to your local pharmacist, GP or specialist nurse.

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and [www.swbhengage.com](http://www.swbhengage.com), follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

## Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- British National Formulary, section 2.9 'Antiplatelet drugs: Aspirin', August 2013
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, CG147 'Lower limb peripheral arterial disease', August 2012

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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