

[IMAGE]

What If Aspirin Really *Doesn't* Help Your Heart?

By Editorial Staff

If you were taught to take aspirin every day as a way to prevent heart attacks and related cardiovascular events, you may need to go back to school. Several new studies suggest the risks associated with taking aspirin on a daily basis may outweigh the benefits.

The first study, published in *Lancet*, enrolled more than 12,000 people from multiple countries (including the U.S.), randomly prescribed either low-dose aspirin (100 mg) or a placebo (an inactive pill participants *thought* was aspirin) daily, and then tracked who suffered cardiovascular death, heart attack, unstable angina, stroke, or transient ischemic attack (TIA) during the study period. All patients were considered at moderate risk for cardiovascular disease (and thus one of the cardiac events listed above) at the start of the study.

After an average follow-up time of five years, researchers compared rates of cardiovascular events between groups and found no significant difference (4.29 percent in the aspirin group; 4.48 percent in the placebo group). However, the rate of gastrointestinal bleeding (a potential side effect of daily aspirin intake) was twice as high in the aspirin group compared to the placebo group (0.97 percent versus 0.46 percent, respectively).

healthy heart - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark A second study, published around the same time in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, examined daily aspirin use in a healthy elderly population and again found a risk of GI bleeding without a significant reduction in the risk of cardiac events. Among 19,000-plus seniors (ages 70 and older) tracked for nearly five years, rates of coronary heart disease, heart attacks and stroke were similar between groups, and essentially the same percentage of seniors were still alive, regardless of whether they took daily aspirin or placebo. Rates of gastrointestinal bleeding were higher in the aspirin group: 3.8 percent compared to only 2.7 percent in the control (placebo) group.

While these findings don't definitively rule out daily aspirin for heart health (particularly in people at high risk for a cardiovascular event or who've already suffered a primary event), they certainly suggest you should always have an in-depth conversation with your doctor before taking aspirin – or any medication –

regarding risks versus benefits. In many cases (cardiovascular health included), a natural, drug-free strategy involving diet, exercise and stress management may be the better – and safer – road to take. Talk to your doctor for more information.

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