If you have heart disease or if you are at high risk for heart disease, taking aspirin daily may reduce your chances of heart attack and stroke.

How do I know if I should take aspirin?

Talk with your doctor or a member of your health care team before you start taking aspirin to make sure it is safe and a good choice for you. Aspirin may be right for you if you have one or both of the following:

- Prior heart attack, stroke, or blocked arteries
- A high risk of developing heart disease or stroke in the next 10 years

Your doctor may be able to help you determine your risk over the next 10 years using a risk calculator program. A risk calculator identifies factors which can increase or influence your risk of heart disease, so your doctor may need to ask a few questions about your health and family history to better assess your risk.

Your doctor may not recommend aspirin for you if you have had bleeding in your brain or are allergic to aspirin. Your doctor may recommend aspirin along with a medication to reduce acid if you take blood thinners such as warfarin (Coumadin) or clopidogrel (Plavix), have previously had ulcers or bleeding from the esophagus, stomach or intestines, or are currently at risk for developing ulcers.

What can I do to reduce my risk of problems while taking aspirin?

Most people who take aspirin don’t have any problems. Some people get an upset stomach. Taking aspirin with food or a meal and a full glass of water may help to prevent stomach upset.

Aspirin can cause more bleeding than usual after surgery or dental work. Your doctor or other health care professional may want you to stop taking your aspirin about one week before you have surgery or dental work. Ask your doctor or dentist if you should stop your aspirin therapy and when it is safe for you to start back on it.

Stop taking aspirin and call your doctor if you develop any of these side effects: nausea and vomiting, indigestion and heartburn, abdominal pain, unusual bleeding or bruising, stools that are bloody or black. (Black stools suggest bleeding.)

How much aspirin should I take?

The most commonly prescribed aspirin dose is 81 mg daily with food.
How do medications fit into my treatment plan?

Although medications are an important part of your treatment plan, they do not take the place of healthy eating, regular physical activity, and stress management. If your doctor prescribes medications, it’s important for you to take them as directed. If you are experiencing side effects, talk with your doctor. He or she may be able to give you an alternative medication.

Be sure to tell your health care team if there are reasons why you cannot take any medication that’s prescribed. Also, tell them if you seem to have trouble remembering to take your medication.

It’s likely that you will need to take this medication for your whole life, so work with your doctor or other health care professional to ensure that your medicine and dose are right for you.

If you believe you cannot afford your medication, financial assistance may be available. To learn more, talk to the pharmacist or call the Medical Financial Assistance Program at 1-866-399-7696.

What do I need to know about my medications?

Take the time to ask your doctor or health care professional about your medications. You may want to ask:

• Why am I taking this medication?
• How often and for how long should I take this medication?
• Should I take this medication at mealtime or with food?
• Are there activities that I should avoid while taking this medication?
• What kind of side effects could I have? What symptoms should I look for?
• How can I avoid side effects while taking this medication?

How can I remember to take my medications?

We all have a hard time adjusting to new routines in our lives. These tips work for others; maybe they can help you too.

• Make a simple chart and post it in an obvious place where you will see it every day, like the bathroom mirror.
• Set your alarm clock, watch, or computer as a reminder.
• Take medications at the same time every day: before bed, at mealtimes, or at the beginning of an activity you do every day, such as watching the evening news.
• Use a pillbox with seven sections, one for each day of the week.
• Record your medication on a wallet card or calendar.
• Can you think of others?

What else can I do to manage my medication?

• Keep an up-to-date personal medication record (wallet card) with you. Include any drug or food allergies that you may have and any over-the-counter or non-prescription medications, herbs, or supplements that you are taking.
• Review your medication record card regularly with your health care professionals, including your dentist.
• When you buy any new medications, including over-the-counter drugs or herbal products, ask the pharmacist to check for any interactions with your current medications.
• Refill your medications at least one to two weeks before you run out. Refills may be processed by phone, online at kp.org/rxrefill, or in person at the pharmacy. For many medications, you can ask for your refills to be delivered by mail to your home at no extra cost.
• If a health care professional recommends it, carry some kind of medical identification, like a Medic Alert bracelet. For more information, call 1-888-633-4298, or go to MedicAlert.org.

Other resources

• Visit your doctor’s home page at kp.org/mydoctor.
• Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.
• If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health, including your heart condition. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.