

HEALTH ALERT!

An Aspirin a Day: Is It For You?

(NAPSA)—Every year, over a million Americans have heart attacks. We know that aspirin is an effective therapy for preventing heart attacks among people who have already been diagnosed with heart disease. For years, doctors have suggested aspirin to prevent a second heart attack in their patients who have already had one.

Now there is new evidence that aspirin can also help prevent heart attacks among people who are at risk of having a heart attack within the next five years. Studies show that aspirin therapy reduces the risk for coronary heart disease by as much as 28 percent for patients who have never had a heart attack but are at a higher risk of having one. Furthermore, low-dose aspirin (75 milligrams) appears to be just as effective as higher doses.

Aspirin therapy also has risks, however. That's why the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (an independent, private-sector group of experts in prevention and primary care charged with review of the clinical evidence on a variety of health conditions) recently issued a recommendation that doctors discuss the benefits and harms of aspirin therapy with their patients who are at an increased risk of coronary heart disease.

Are you at risk for a heart attack?

You may be at higher risk for a heart attack if you are a man over 40, a woman past menopause, a



smoker or someone with diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or a family history of heart disease. You can also determine your risk level by using one of the easy-to-use, free calculators on the Internet, such as the one at: <http://hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/atpiii/calculator.asp>.

What should you do?

Don't just start taking aspirin without discussing the pros and cons with your doctor, especially if you are at high risk. Continued use of aspirin can cause bleeding in the stomach or brain. You and your doctor will need to weigh the benefits and risks and decide what makes the most sense for you.

For further information on the aspirin recommendation, go to www.ahrq.gov and click on "Preventive Services" and then on "U.S. Preventive Services Task Force—Releases and Recommendations," or call the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse at 1-800-358-9295.