A common **wonder drug**

Aspirin is one of the best tested and most effective medications available, as well as being very inexpensive. In the right patients, aspirin can:

- **prevent blood clots**
- **prevent heart attacks**
- **prevent strokes**
- **SAVE LIVES.**

Platelets are tiny particles in the blood that help it clot, but sometimes they stick together when they shouldn't, forming a clot that can cause a heart attack or stroke. Drugs like aspirin, Plavix (clopidogrel), Aggrenox (aspirin-dipyridamole), and Effient (prasugrel) make it harder for the platelets to stick together, and in this way, these drugs can help prevent heart attacks or strokes. However, these medications can also slightly increase the risk of bleeding.

Your doctor can help decide when the important benefits of these drugs outweigh their risks.

Many studies have measured the effects of aspirin and Plavix. Here are some summaries to discuss with your doctor when making this important choice.

These are general guidelines only; all decisions about which medication to take (including aspirin) must be made in consultation with your doctor.

Check with your doctor to see whether aspirin, clopidogrel (Plavix), another drug, or a combination is best for you. Plavix can cost up to $160 per month compared to $1 per month for aspirin, and for some patients is no better.

Don't take aspirin while you are taking Plavix or Effient unless your doctor has specifically told you to do so, since this can increase the risk of bleeding.

The Alosa Foundation

The Independent Drug Information Service (iDiS) is supported by the PACE Program of the Department of Aging of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and the Washington D.C. Department of Health.

This material is provided by The Alosa Foundation, a nonprofit organization that is not affiliated in any way with any pharmaceutical company or medical insurer.

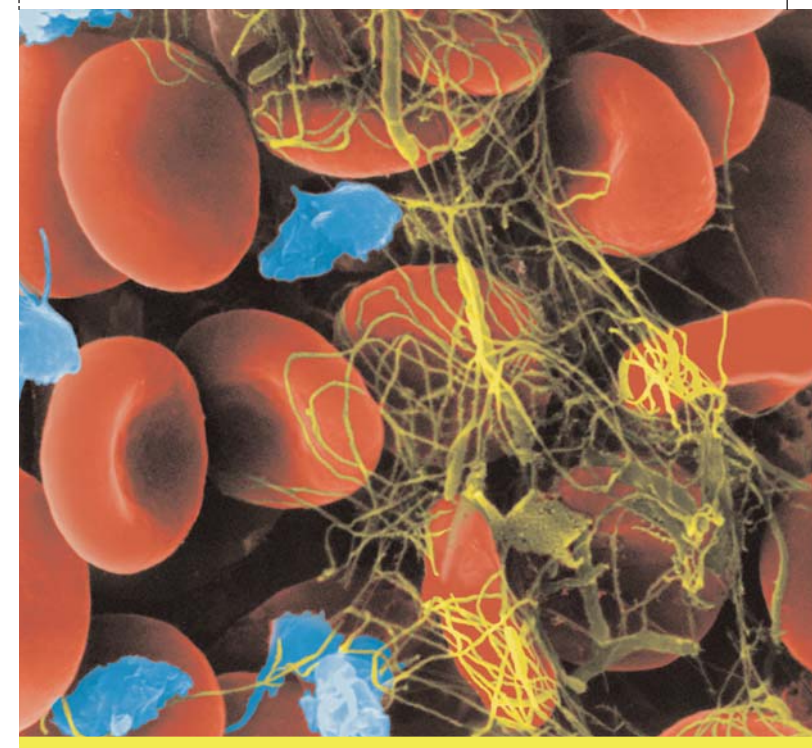
These are general recommendations only; specific clinical decisions should be made by the treating physician based on an individual patient's clinical condition.

Balanced data about medications

Cover Image © Dennis Kunkel Microscopy, Inc.

©2009 The Alosa Foundation, all rights reserved.

November 2009



Should you take an aspirin a day?

For many patients, the common aspirin can safely prevent heart attacks and strokes. Others may require a prescription medicine.

Which might be right for you?

The Alosa Foundation

Balanced data about medications

You may need
"primary prevention"

Even if you have never had a heart attack or stroke, or other problems with your arteries, your doctor may recommend **low-dose aspirin** to prevent these from occurring in the future. Such "primary prevention" can lower your chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

You may benefit from primary prevention if you are:

- a man aged 45 or over, or a woman aged 55 or over, and
- at high risk of heart disease or stroke.

However, not everyone needs aspirin and it can cause bleeding. Your doctor can determine if the potential benefits of using aspirin outweigh the potential harm.

You can look up your own personal risk for heart disease at this website: **www.med-decisions.com**

If you have had a heart attack

If you had a heart attack in the past year talk with your doctor about whether you should take **both aspirin and Plavix (clopidogrel).**

If you have had a stent placed in an artery in your heart in the past year, talk with your doctor about whether you should take **aspirin plus Plavix or aspirin plus Effient.**

If you had a heart attack or stent placed more than a year ago, your doctor may recommend aspirin alone. If you have additional medical problems, your doctor may choose to prescribe **Plavix** for you instead of aspirin.

If you have
peripheral vascular disease

This condition, also called peripheral artery disease, is a narrowing of blood vessels in the legs or arms, and can cause muscle cramping with exercise. Your doctor can perform specific tests to tell if you have peripheral vascular disease (PVD).

If you do, your doctor may choose to prescribe **Plavix**.

If you have had a stroke

Your doctor may choose to prescribe **aspirin, Plavix, or a combination of aspirin and dipyridamole (Aggrenox).**