

HealthIsNumberOne.com News 1

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Aspirin For Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease

By Dr. Craig M. Wax

Much has been written and said about the use of an aspirin dose daily to prevent recurrent cardiovascular disease including heart attack (myocardial infarction or MI) and stroke (cerebrovascular accident or CVA). This is known as secondary prevention. It is now clear that it can also be used in patients at risk for either a first heart attack or stroke. This is known as primary prevention.

This is excellent news for all those with personal health risk factors and family history of adverse events. These risks include a person's own history of smoking, high blood pressure (hypertension), high blood cholesterol & triglycerides (hyperlipidemia), diabetes and obesity are important. Of course, these risk factors should be eliminated or optimally managed as well. A daily dose of aspirin has also been found to benefit individuals with a family history of cardiovascular disease and premature death in parents and siblings.

This news was organized and released as part of the third U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) as of 2002. The recommendation from the USPSTF was given the highest rating of "A." This means, "the intervention is strongly recommended." The whole report is available on the web at <http://ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstf/upsasmi.htm>.

Aspirin, like other medications, does have side effects. Risks and benefits should be discussed with your family physician. Aspirin is not for patients with stomach ulcers, bleeding problems (coagulopathies) for example.

Aspirin is available in multiple doses including 81mg, 162mg and 325mg. There are enteric coated and uncoated varieties. There are recognizable brand names and inexpensive generic versions. As with all health and medication matters, these should be discussed with your family physician to determine which may be right for you.

Tune in to "Your Health Matters" WGLS 89.7 FM Rowan University Thursdays from 5:30 to 6:00pm

Heart Disease, Homocysteine & Vitamins

By Dr. Craig M. Wax

Lowering homocysteine levels with certain vitamins can improve outcomes after a coronary angioplasty procedure. Angioplasty is a procedure in which a balloon is placed and inflated in a coronary artery to clear a blockage. It is one of the treatment options available for coronary artery disease. A Swiss research study entitled "decreased rate of coronary restenosis after lowering of plasma homocysteine levels," was published in the November 29, 2001 *New England Journal of Medicine* confirms this.

The vitamins used in the study were folic acid 1mg, vitamin B12 400 mcg and pyridoxine 10mg. These vitamins have been shown to lower homocysteine levels. Homocysteine is an amino acid that may contribute to coronary artery disease when found in high levels in the bloodstream. In addition, folic acid, vitamin B12, and pyridoxine have numerous other health benefits.

The Swiss study only involved patients with established coronary artery disease. This means that taking those vitamins and lowering homocysteine levels can be used for secondary prevention. This study did not address primary prevention (preventing disease in healthy patients). Folic acid 1mg, vitamin B12 400 micrograms and pyridoxine 10mg are a safe and inexpensive addition to most lifestyles. Most multivitamin / multimineral supplements contain these agents in varying amounts.

Talk to your family physician about your risk factors for cardiovascular disease and make a health plan that includes diet, vitamins and exercise.

**Summer is a good time for your
Complete History and Physical Exam
to help you prevent medical
problems.**

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Managing Stress, a Family Effort

Stress is an inevitable part of living. People not only cope with it at their jobs, but also within their homes. There are approximately 20 million families with either a single working parent, or two working parents according to "Investing in Child Care," a 1998 United States Treasury Report. Parents endure demanding schedules where they strive to balance the responsibilities of their jobs and their homes. Like their parents, children also experience stress. Children may feel stress from schoolwork, athletics, and their social lives. In addition, events that directly affect the entire family such as the arrival of a new baby, or fights between siblings or parents inflict stress upon all family members. It is important to realize and examine how these stressful situations affect the family as a whole, not just the individual.

"The key to maintaining a healthy and productive family is learning, as a unit, how to manage stress," says Craig M. Wax, D.O., a family physician. "The first step that families need to take is to learn about the different things that are happening in each other's lives." Knowing what family members do throughout the day provides a better understanding of the way they feel and behave.

In addition to understanding the potentially stressful events that each member experiences, it is important to discuss events that affect the entire family. Find out how each member views an issue that is occurring within the home. Does everyone view it as important, or do they agree that it is insignificant? Or is everyone in complete disagreement? Learning each family member's view will provide a better understanding of the level of stress they are experiencing.

Once family members have discussed their points of view concerning an issue, they may then examine the different options,

resources, and limitations that are available to them. According to Dr. Wax, these include the family's communication patterns, their ability to solve problems, their goals, money, relatives and friends, and services in the community. After looking at these factors together, families should then decide on a plan of action using their resources. Talking about each family member's concerns, then looking at the options available, will allow families to work through their problems together to effectively manage their stress.

"While it is important for family members to interact when managing stressful situations, it is also important for them to regularly participate in activities that promote interaction," explains Dr. Wax. "Going on a weekend trip, playing a game of basketball, or seeing a movie are all relatively simple and enjoyable activities that promote family interaction." A family who engages in these activities will feel more comfortable communicating their concerns when a stressful event or situation arises.

Dr. Wax emphasizes that behaviors that attempt to mask or ignore problems only increase levels of stress among family members. Open lines of communication along with behavior that promotes love and support will enable a family to successfully manage their lives and their stress.

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