



Visit your doctor to talk about your health and the medicines you may need. This factsheet will give you information about a type of medicine. You will learn what questions you should ask your doctor about this medicine. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is very important for your health.

Medicines to Treat Heart Disease and More

If you have heart disease or a condition that affects your veins and arteries, you should try to stay in good shape. This includes exercising, eating a healthy diet, and controlling your cholesterol and blood pressure levels.

But sometimes doing all of this is not enough. If you suffer from heart disease and need to take medicine, then this information will be helpful for you. Learn about medicines like aspirin and similar medications, known as **antiplatelets**, which can help protect your heart.



What are antiplatelet medicines and how do they work?

Antiplatelets are a type of medicine doctors use to prevent tiny cell fragments in the blood called **platelets** from clumping together and forming a **blood clot** in veins and arteries. Blood clots can lead to heart attacks, heart disease, brain strokes, and poor blood circulation throughout the body that can especially affect your arms and legs. Having a blood clot could also cause death. To understand how these types of medicines work, it is important to understand how platelets work, too.

Platelets are tiny cell fragments in the blood that have an important function in the body. When a healthy person gets injured, like with a cut or deep scratch, the platelets in that person's blood clump and make blood clots. Because of these blood clots, the bleeding stops.

However, in some people, the platelets may clump more than normal and this can lead to health problems. When blood clots happen, there is less space in the artery for the blood to flow which can cause a blockage. So...



If the blockage is located in an artery that feeds the heart, the person may have a **heart attack**.



If the blockage is located in an artery that goes to the brain or is in the brain, the person may have a **stroke**.



If the blockage is located in an artery of the leg or arm, the person may have bad blood circulation and some **muscles and other tissues can be damaged**.

Antiplatelets can prevent these serious health problems from happening because these medicines help prevent the blood clots from forming.



Who may need an antiplatelet medicine?

You may need to take an antiplatelet medicine if:

1. You smoke, have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, or are overweight, even if you have not been diagnosed with heart disease.
2. You have heart disease and you feel chest pain after exercising or going through a very stressful time, but this pain goes away with rest. Doctors call this type of chest pain stable angina.
3. You have heart disease and you feel a lot of chest pain, even when you are just sitting around and not doing any physical activity. Doctors call this type of chest pain unstable angina.
4. You are in the middle of having a heart attack or right after having a heart attack.
5. You have had a coronary angioplasty. This is a heart surgery to find a blockage in the artery and to open it with a tiny balloon. Also, the doctor may insert a tiny wire-mesh tube called a stent to open the artery.
6. You have had a bypass surgery. With this surgery, doctors remove the part of your heart artery that is not working and replace it with a good artery from another part of your body.
7. You have had a brain stroke.

- 8. You have poor blood flow to your legs, or your tests show that there is a total or partial blockage in your leg artery.



What are some of the side effects of antiplatelet medicines?

- **For most people**, the side effects are minor and usually go away with time, like diarrhea, dizziness, or nausea.
- **In rare cases**, the side effects can be very dangerous, like a rash, or bleeding in the stomach, nose, or brain.



In the United States, “generic” medicines are just as good as brand-name medicines. They are very safe and work just like the brand-name medicine, and they cost a lot less money. Ask your doctor if you can get a generic medicine instead of a brand-name medicine.

The newer antiplatelet medicines (not aspirin) can cause very severe side effects that could lead to death, like having a low count of white blood cells, or when the body stops making new red blood cells. If you take any of the newer antiplatelet medicines, like *ticlopidine* (brand-name *Ticlid* and generic), see your doctor and get regular lab tests to find any possible problems.

If you have any of these rare side effects or if your side effects are very severe, you should see a doctor right away or go to a hospital emergency room.



What are the best antiplatelet medicines for you?

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs evaluated the medicines to treat heart disease by comparing how well they work, how safe they are, and their cost. *Consumer Reports* recommends the following antiplatelet medicines depending on your health situation:

Type of antiplatelet	When to use it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirin plus clopidogrel (brand-name Plavix or generic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have been diagnosed with unstable angina, have had a heart attack, or you have had a stent put in to help your heart.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clopidogrel (brand-name Plavix or generic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you cannot take aspirin and have been diagnosed with unstable angina, have had a heart attack, or you have had a stent put in to help your heart.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirin • Aspirin plus extended-release dipyridamole (brand-name Aggrenox) • Clopidogrel (brand-name Plavix or generic) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have had a stroke or a mini-stroke. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspirin | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have clots in your arms or legs. |

To learn more about this topic go to:

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2011/09/best-blood-thinners-to-prevent-heart-attack-and-stroke/index.htm>



How to Get the Best Price for Your Medicines

- **Ask for a generic:** Tell your pharmacist you want a generic medicine instead of the brand-name. You will pay less for a generic. Not all brand-name medicines have a generic, but many do.
- **Compare prices:** Call or visit three different pharmacies. Give them the name of the medicine and ask how much it costs. Ask if they have a drug discount program that can help you pay less for your medicine. Buy your medicine from the pharmacy that gives you the cheapest price.
- **Sign up for patient assistance programs:** Most companies that make medicines have programs that help people that don't have a lot of money and do not have insurance get brand name medicines for free or at a low cost. The Partnership for Prescription Assistance can help you find a program: www.pparx.org or 1-888-477-2669.

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