
ASA and Stroke—What You Need to Know

What is ASA and how does it work?

ASA (acetylsalicylic acid) is commonly known as *aspirin*. It is an over-the-counter drug that stops tiny cells in the blood (platelets) from clumping together (clotting) and forming blood clots that can cause a stroke. In the store, ASA is sold under several brand names, including Aspirin® and Anacin®.

Why do I need ASA?

Your doctor wants you to take ASA because it is a powerful way to prevent another stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA). It is important that you continue taking ASA for as long as recommended by your doctor—probably for the rest of your life.

How much ASA will I take?

We know that a single tablet of ASA does the job. Take the dose that your doctor recommends.

Does ASA have side effects?

Because ASA stops blood from clotting, there is a chance it can cause bleeding (hemorrhage) in other parts of your body. This is why ASA should not be used by people with ulcers or history of other bleeding problems unless directed by a physician. ASA can also irritate the stomach lining. Be sure to talk to your doctor if your stomach feels upset after taking ASA, or if you notice that any of your bowel movements are black—this may be the first sign of bleeding in the stomach. If you can't take ASA, there are other effective prescription medications that your doctor may consider, but these are more expensive.

Is there anything else I should know?

While ASA is an important part of prevention, it doesn't mean you should stop paying attention to other factors that increase your risk for another stroke or TIA. So try to eat less fat and more fruits and vegetables, exercise regularly, avoid smoking and take all medications as prescribed by your doctor.

Finally, always tell other doctors or dentists if you are taking ASA on a regular basis.

