

An Aspirin a Day Poses Health Risk

Millions of people who take aspirin regularly to help stave off heart disease or strokes may be doing themselves more harm than good, researchers warn. Many over-50s who take the drug are nearly doubling their chances of suffering from ulcers and internal bleeding, which can lead to death, according to an analysis of 24 studies on aspirin involving 66,000 patients. Even low doses over long periods can cause such serious damage that patients need to consider closely the trade-off between the possible benefits and harms, say Yoon Kong Loke and Sheena Derry, of the Radcliffe infirmary, Oxford, in the *British Medical Journal*.

They found that "about one in 100 patients taking aspirin over a 28 month period will experience a gastrointestinal haemorrhage. No evidence exists that dose reduction or the use of modified release formulations significantly lowers the risk." Their analysis of all studies over longer periods suggested that bleeding occurred in 2.5% of patients taking aspirin compared with 1.4% who were not.

Men over 50 and women after the menopause are frequently advised to take aspirin, which thins the blood, reducing the chances of thrombosis. But thinning the blood also increases the chances of bleeding.

Over the past 10 years doses recommended for such preventative therapy have been reduced from about 300mg a day to 75mg, while short treatments for headaches can involve 600mg to 900mg.