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Does an aspirin regimen benefit women?

There was a time when aspirin was believed to benefit both men and women in the same way, but a 10-year study of 40,000 women concluded in 2005 that while a low-dose aspirin regimen did significantly reduce the risk of stroke and heart attacks in women over the age of 65, it did not appear to provide any benefit to younger women with no prior history of heart disease.

Participants in the federally-funded Women's Health Study, conducted by Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston, were given either 100 mg. of Bayer aspirin every other day or a placebo; all of the women were age 45 or older and in good health. At the conclusion of the study, doctors found that there was no significant reduction of the incidence of heart attacks, but there was a 17% reduction of the overall risk of stroke, with a 24% reduction of ischemic stroke, the most common type. Statistics show more women suffer from stroke than men, and twice as many women die from stroke each year as do from breast cancer.

The 4000 women in the study who were over the age of 65 appeared to gain the most benefits from the aspirin regimen, with a 26% lower risk of having a major cardiovascular episode, while their risk of heart attack dropped by a whopping 34%. The study prompted researchers to hail the results as finally providing some definitive evidence that men and women respond differently to an aspirin regimen. A six-year study of 22,000 healthy men concluded in 1988 that an aspirin regimen produced a 47% reduction of heart attacks — findings which, at the time, were thought to apply equally to women.

Anyone interested in starting a low-dose aspirin regimen should first consult with their physician to discuss both the risks and benefits. If you want to learn more about the Women's Health Study, low-dose aspirin regimens, and women's risk of stroke, click on the following links:

http://www.bayeraspirin.com/hdwomen/hdwomen_studyresult.htm
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A13618-2005Mar7.html>
<http://www.stroke.org/site/PageServer?pagename=WOMEN>