

Taking Aspirin during pregnancy to prevent pre-eclampsia

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You have been asked to take aspirin during your pregnancy to reduce the risk of pre-eclampsia.

This leaflet explains more about why we have asked you to take aspirin during your pregnancy. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is pre-eclampsia?

Pre-eclampsia affects around two to eight in every 100 pregnant women. The usual symptoms of pre-eclampsia are raised blood pressure and protein levels in your urine. Usually you will not notice these signs, but they will be picked up during routine antenatal visits. You may also experience the swelling of your hands, feet and face. Pre-eclampsia usually occurs towards the end of pregnancy and in a mild form.

The high blood pressure can be treated with medication, but pre-eclampsia itself is not cured until the baby is delivered (usually at 37-38 weeks). In rarer cases (around five per 1,000 pregnant women) it leads to a more severe form of the disease. This may start earlier and affect the growth of the baby in the womb or the health of the mother. In these cases the baby may need to be delivered (induced) earlier.

Can pre-eclampsia be predicted?

When the midwife sees you on your first visit, she will ask you a series of questions to assess whether you are at risk of getting pre-eclampsia. There are some factors that put you at a higher risk of getting pre-eclampsia and some that can give you a moderate risk level. If you have at least one high risk factor or two moderate risk factors, the midwife will ask you to take aspirin for the rest of your pregnancy.

Women with one high risk factor or two moderate risk factors should be advised to take 150mg aspirin a day from 12 weeks until birth.

High risk factors		Moderate risk factors	
Hypertensive disease during a previous pregnancy		First pregnancy	
Chronic Kidney Disease		Being over 40 years of age	
Autoimmune Disease such as SLE or Antiphospholipid syndrome		10 years or more since a previous pregnancy	
Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes		Family history of pre-eclampsia	
Chronic Hypertension		BMI over 35kg/m ² at booking	
		A multiple pregnancy	

Sometimes, your doctor can advise you to take aspirin for other reasons. For example, if your blood test as part of the scan at 11–14 weeks shows low levels of a placental protein called PAPP-A, or if you have sickle cell disease (inherited health conditions that affect the red blood cells).

If you have previously had stomach ulcers, bleeding disorders or asthma, please consult your doctor before taking aspirin.

Why does aspirin help?

There is evidence that taking aspirin (150mg) every day protects against pre-eclampsia and in general, against high blood pressure in pregnancy. Although it is recommended that you take aspirin for those reasons, it is an unlicensed use of the medicine.

What happens next?

We will ask your GP to give you a prescription for aspirin.

You should start taking aspirin when you are 12 weeks pregnant. Aspirin started earlier than this is safe and may bring increased benefits but this has not been proven.

We recommend that you take the aspirin with food. It does not matter if you occasionally miss a dose. You should continue to take the aspirin through the whole of your pregnancy.

We will continue to monitor you throughout your pregnancy. We will test your blood pressure and urine at your antenatal visits to check for signs of pre-eclampsia. How frequently we monitor you at appointments will depend on your individual health condition.

Please note: we do not recommend taking high-dose aspirin (more than 150mg) during pregnancy, which is why a missed dose should be skipped rather than accumulated.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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