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## **Should we all take aspirin to prevent heart disease?**

Willow tree bark has an active ingredient (a phytonutrient called salicylic acid) that acts as an anti-inflammatory and painkiller. It has been used since the 1800's to treat fever and pain.

Today, Aspirin, derived from willow tree bark, is our most used drug. Aspirin's salicylic acid also acts as a blood thinner. And it has become even more popular lately, because many rely on this blood-thinning property to prevent heart disease.

In the 1950s and 60s evidence showed that aspirin reduced the risk of blood clotting. And by 1970 it was found that taking aspirin regularly protects against heart attacks. The official recommendation today is that those with a history of heart disease or stroke should take a low dose aspirin daily. However, those without a known history should only follow these recommendations when heart disease benefits from taking aspirin outweigh the risks of bleeding. Evidently, bleeding can be a severe side-effect linked to regular aspirin use.

If you've never had a heart attack or stroke and decide to take low-dose aspirin daily to prevent blood clotting, you may increase your risk of a hemorrhagic stroke (bleeding within the brain) and several other major bleeding complications. Discuss the risks/benefits with your doctor.

However, the best advice for those who have no history of heart attack – but are worried about it – is to start worrying about what you are eating, instead. Willow tree bark isn't the only plant that has anti-clotting or blood thinning properties – *all plants* have phytonutrients like salicylic acid or other properties that thin the blood.

There is plenty of evidence to show heart disease can be prevented, and, yes, even reversed by eating more plant-based foods; veggies and fruit, root vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds – and putting less focus on oils, dairy, and meats. This is supported by credible research, including the famous Framingham Heart Study. The study's long-time director, Bill Castelli, endorses a plant-based diet. Castelli believes if we all ate healthfully, the heart disease epidemic would disappear.

Heart disease is the second leading cause of death among Canadians (cancer takes first place). If taking blood-thinners could indeed reduce our current epidemic levels, this is truly a sad reflection of our current diet. And it's perhaps a strong indication that we need to eat more veggies!

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