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## Aspirin Blocking Blood Clots: For Some, It Doesn't Work

Doctors are narrowing their recommendation on who should take daily aspirin for heart health, based largely on concerns about the drug's side effects, which can include bleeding ulcers. See [here](#) for more about that.

But there's another type of person who might someday be advised to steer clear of a daily aspirin: those for whom the pain reliever doesn't work well as a blood clotter.

In most people, aspirin has an anti-clotting effect on the blood, which is believed to be the most important reason for its ability to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke. But when some people take the drug, their blood still clots, a phenomenon traditionally called "aspirin resistance." That suggests that they may not get as much heart-protection benefit from it.



Estimates of how common the issue is vary widely. One rough measure is that perhaps 10% to 20% of patients who take aspirin because they've had a clot in the past suffer another one despite the drug.

New research is helping to pinpoint the cause of aspirin resistance, including that the phrase itself may be a misnomer. [A study](#) published in the journal *Circulation* last year suggested that the reason isn't always that the drug fails to do what it's supposed to do. The problem is that there are several triggers for blood clotting, and aspirin's effect is mostly on one. In some folks, the mechanisms that aspirin doesn't affect are very powerful, so they can get clots despite the drug.

At Duke University, a new National Institutes of Health-funded trial is looking at whether it might be possible to pinpoint genetic characteristics of people for whom aspirin doesn't block clotting. It began in September and is set to go for two years. "We want to understand the biology and the genetics of those other pathways" to clotting, said Deepak Voora, a Duke cardiologist who is involved in the study.

For now, doctors say, it's far from proven that administering blood tests to people who are considering taking a daily aspirin to prevent heart attacks and strokes is worthwhile.

Ned Calonge, the chair of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, said the group didn't consider the issue in writing its [new aspirin guidelines](#), because the studies that were used as evidence didn't test participants for aspirin resistance. Still, he pointed out, it's likely that the trials included some people with the issue, as the general population does.

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