

## Aspirin: A wonder drug against cancer?



Does aspirin protect against breast cancer? The jury's still out. In one large study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, women who took a daily aspirin reduced their breast cancer risk by 28 percent. The drug seems to work by blocking prostaglandins, hormone-like substances needed to produce estrogen and progesterone, which are known to fuel breast cancer growth. That could mean aspirin is potentially helpful in fighting hormone-sensitive cancers.

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But don't start popping aspirin tablets quite yet. Since long-term aspirin use can cause serious internal bleeding and hemorrhagic stroke, the American Cancer Society does not recommend you begin taking aspirin to prevent cancer. People at increased risk for bleeding problems from aspirin use are those who have a history of peptic ulcers, liver or kidney disease, bleeding disorders or gastrointestinal bleeding. What's more, studies have shown mixed results about aspirin's breast cancer-fighting ability.

Bottom line: If your health-care provider has suggested you take aspirin to protect your heart, you may be deriving additional benefit. Otherwise, talk to him or her about safer ways to lower your risk of breast cancer. •

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## **Can you K.O. arthritis with spinach?**

A recent Boston University study of 650 people found that people who have low levels of vitamin K in their bodies are more likely to have osteoarthritis than people with adequate levels of the vitamin. Although the scientists aren't saying that a vitamin K deficiency is the cause of osteoarthritis, they learned that study participants who had a vitamin K deficiency were more apt to have bone spurs—outgrowths of bone common in people with arthritis.

Your body uses vitamin K for blood clotting. Food sources of the vitamin include leafy green vegetables like spinach, as well as cauliflower, cabbage and soybeans. If you eat a variety of vegetables, you may have your vitamin K needs covered. However, people who've used oral antibiotics for a long time and people unable to absorb the vitamin from the intestinal tract may be deficient.

Regular bruising or bleeding could mean you're deficient. Caution: If you use a blood thinner such as warfarin, talk to your doctor since too much vitamin K may interfere with the drug's ability to thin your blood. ●

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# 5 easy ways to keep your brain cells healthy

Just like you can safeguard your body and your health, you can also preserve your memory and thinking abilities by adopting these goals:

## 1 Control your weight.

Maintaining a healthy weight is just as important as adding nutritious foods to your diet. Studies show that adults who were obese in middle age were twice as likely to develop dementia in their later years as leaner adults. And people with high blood pressure and cholesterol were six times more likely to develop dementia.

**2 Drink lightly—or drink juice.** While heavy drinking can lead to permanent brain damage, moderate alcohol consumption

boosts blood flow to the brain and reduces the risk of small strokes. Evidence shows that a drink or two a day for men and one half to one drink a day for women preserves brain function and memory better than not drinking—unless you're downing fruit or vegetable juice, that is. One study found that older adults who drank at least three glasses of juice a week had a 75 percent lower risk of Alzheimer's disease than one-glass-a-week drinkers.

**3 Go nuts.** Nuts' monounsaturated fat helps lower cholesterol, protect arteries and fight inflammation. Studies show that eating nuts may reduce your risk for Alzheimer's disease.

## 4 Consider supplements.

Doctors usually recommend you get your nutrients from whole foods rather than supplements. But if a smaller appetite causes you to eat less—or you know you don't eat as well as you should—you may have vitamin deficiencies that increase your risk for dementia. Ask your doctor if a vitamin or supplement may help.

**5 Get physical.** Regular exercise increases the flow of blood and nutrients to your brain, battles chronic stress and curbs the release of brain-damaging hormones. Aim for a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week. •

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