Your guide to

Aspirin

Information and advice

MPN voice

MPN voice

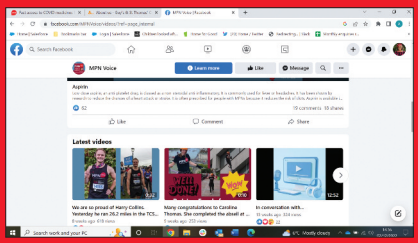
Supporting patients and families affected by MPN

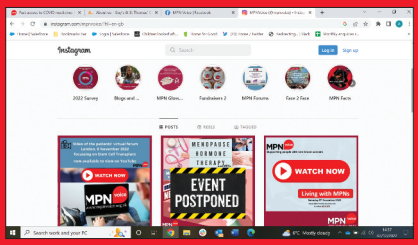
Established by a group of MPN patients in 2003, MPN Voice, registered under the auspices of Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation, has a website with a lively online community and up to date information on essential thrombocythaemia (ET), polycythaemia vera (PV), and myelofibrosis (MF).

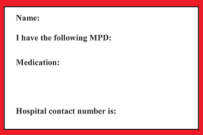
Backed by leading healthcare professionals, MPN Voice also publishes MPN disease and drug leaflets, runs regular in-person regional and online patient forums, has a prominent social media presence, funds MPN research and offers a buddy scheme.

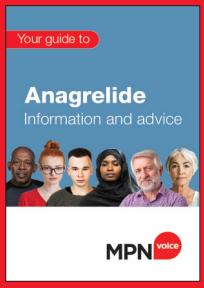
For more information visit the website **www.mpnvoice.org.uk**

Email **info@mpnvoice.org.uk**









What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet is for people with myeloproliferative neoplasms (MPNs). It offers information about low-dose aspirin, an over-the-counter medication often recommended for people with MPNs.

In this leaflet you will learn:

- How aspirin works
- The benefits and drawbacks of taking this medication
- How to take and store this medication
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- How to feel your best while taking aspirin

It is important that in addition to this leaflet you read the information provided with your medicine. If you need more information about myeloproliferative neoplasms in general please ask your local hospital or visit our website at www.mpnvoice.org.uk

What is aspirin?

Aspirin is an anti-platelet drug and is classed as a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug. This means that it reduces inflammation but does not contain steroids.

Aspirin is a drug that is very familiar to most people. It is a medication that most of us have taken at one time or another for fever or a headache. But aspirin also has other qualities, it is an anti-platelet drug that has been shown by research to reduce the chances of a heart attack or stroke.

Aspirin is often prescribed by haematologists for people with MPNs, because it reduces the risk of clots. This treatment does have some side effects, but it is safe for most people. Aspirin is available in tablet form and dispersible form (dissolves in water). Some tablets are enteric coated or gastro-resistant meaning it is coated with a substance that protects the lining of the stomach by delaying absorption until it reaches the intestines.

How does aspirin work?

Aspirin is a drug that acts on platelets in your body. It blocks a platelet enzyme, and this reduces the ability of platelets to form clumps or clots. Aspirin makes the platelets less “sticky”, so that they are less likely to stick together. Research shows that aspirin is very effective at reducing risks of heart attacks and strokes in many people with different levels of risk.

How can taking aspirin help me?

People with MPNs have what is called “sticky blood”, meaning that the blood of people with MPNs is more likely to form clots than normal.

This “blood stickiness” is caused both by an increase in the number of blood cells and an increase in how likely these cells are to stick both to each other and to the blood vessel wall. Aspirin reduces the stickiness of blood cells, making them less likely to stick to each other and the blood vessel wall. Aspirin does not alter the number of platelets and other blood cells in the body.

While aspirin isn’t appropriate for everyone, this treatment is an excellent choice for many people. If your MPN is low risk and you have a low risk of clots, you may be able to take 75 mg low-dose aspirin, (or in the US 81 mg) and in some cases you may not need any additional treatment. If you have Polycythaemia Vera (PV) you may be able to combine aspirin therapy with your phlebotomy treatments (venesections).

If you have more risk factors or if your platelet count is higher, your haematologist may recommend that you take aspirin in conjunction with other medications such as hydroxycarbamide. The two drugs work in different ways to help reduce your risk of clots such as heart attack or stroke.

Aspirin may not be suitable if you have low platelets and if you suffer from bleeding. It is also known to increase the risk of developing asthma.

Sometimes other anti-platelet drugs such as clopidogrel or Plavix are given instead of aspirin.

Recommended dosage

- The most common recommended doses are 75 mg to 150 mg once only daily or occasionally on alternate days. Regularly missing doses stops the drug's effect and causes the platelets to become sticky again, so it is important to maintain your regular dose
- Do not break, crush or chew the tablets. Take them with a full glass of water, after eating
- Follow the directions on the package or prescription label carefully. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or clinical nurse specialist to explain any part of the instructions that you do not understand
- Do not take more or less than directed
- Store in a cool dry place away from direct heat and light

It is important to note that the dose for aspirin when given as a pain-killer is much higher than the dose recommended for patients with MPN.

NOTE: The UK Department of Heath recommends that anyone over 70 on regular aspirin takes a proton pump inhibitor drug to protect the stomach.

Are there any side effects?

Common (about one in ten to one in a hundred, 1–10%):

- Tightness in chest/difficulty in breathing
- Heartburn/acid reflux
- Gastric ulceration (sometimes you will be given medication to protect your tummy)
- Gastrointestinal haemorrhage (gut bleed)
- Other haemorrhage (bleeding)

Rare (one in 1000 to one in 10,000, 0.01–0.1%):

- Kidney or liver abnormalities
- Allergic reactions
- Nausea and vomiting
- Reye's Syndrome (children)

Frequently asked questions

What if I have other medical conditions?

Please inform your doctor or clinical nurse specialist if you have any of the following conditions:

- Asthma
- Peptic ulcers
- Previous haemorrhage
- Acquired von Willebrand's disease
- Uncontrollable hypertension
- G6PD deficiency
- Hepatic impairment
- Renal impairment
- Haemophilia
- Platelet count in below 100 x 109/L

Please also inform your doctor if you are pregnant or currently breastfeeding.

Interactions with other medications

Aspirin can interact with some other drugs, and it can also interact with alcohol. Please inform your doctor or clinical nurse specialist if you consume alcoholic drinks and if you take any of the medications listed below:

- Clopidogel or plavix
- Eptofobatide
- Heparin
- NSAIDS: ibuprofen, naproxen or diclofenac
- Antacids
- Warfarin or other anticoagulant medications
- Phenytoin
- Valproate
- Corticosteroids
- Methotrexate
- Spironolactone

If you are recommended to take pain killers that are also classified as a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) please discuss with your GP or Haematology nurse or doctor prior to starting.

Many over the counter cold and pain medications contain Aspirin. Please check with your pharmacist or doctor prior to taking.

What if I need to have a medical procedure?

For most procedures it is safe to continue aspirin but this should always be discussed with the doctor or dentist performing the procedure as occasionally aspirin needs to be stopped seven days prior to any operation. This is because aspirin can increase the risk of bleeding.

What can I do to help myself?

If you have an MPN it's important to take good care of yourself. There are many things you can do to feel better.

- Good nutrition is important. Eat a balanced diet including lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, lean protein and whole grains
- Drink plenty of water and be careful to prevent dehydration by avoiding excessive alcohol and caffeinated drinks
- Maintain a normal weight and maintain your muscle mass to help keep your cholesterol and blood sugar within normal limits
- Exercise is very beneficial for people with MPNs and helps to fight fatigue. Be sure to check with your GP and haematologist before launching on any new programme and start slowly and gently if you have not exercised before
- Stop smoking. Ask your GP if you need help
- Ensure that you have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked yearly at your GP surgery

Making the adjustment

It can be disconcerting to start a new medication or find you must increase your dosage. You may feel that your MPN is getting worse or that you are at greater risk of serious medical problems. You may also feel concerned about the long and short term risks of taking this medication. It is normal to feel this way and many people with MPNs have had similar experiences. You may want to discuss your concerns with a family member or friend. MPN Voice offers a “buddy” programme for interested patients. Contact us at buddies@mpnvoice.org.uk for more information.

It’s worth bearing in mind that many people with MPNs have a long life expectancy, and that the treatments are very effective at controlling cell production. You can read more about the psychological aspects of MPN treatment on our website at www.mpnvoice.org.uk under “Support”.

Medical exemptions for treatment

MPN patients in England are entitled to an exemption certificate and should obtain a FP92A form from their GP or haematologist. Further details can be found on our website at www.mpnvoice.org.uk in the living with MPNs, everyday challenges/cost of medication section.

Resources for patients and families

MPN Voice

Registered under the auspices of Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation, MPN Voice provides patients and families affected by MPNs with a comprehensive range of disease and medication publications, a buddy scheme and runs regional in-person forums and online forums as well as funding research into MPNs and drugs trials. The website also offers access to an online community of MPN patients as well as the latest news and reports from leading healthcare professionals.

Tel: 07934 689354
www.mpnvoice.org.uk

Anthony Nolan

Its vision is to save the lives of everyone who needs a bone marrow or stem cell transplant. Established in 1974, the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Register was the founding member of Bone Marrows Worldwide in 1988. Today the register has over 600,000 potential donors on it.

Tel: 0303 303 0303
www.anthonynolan.org

British Heart Foundation

Founded over 60 years ago by a group of medical professionals who wanted to fund extra research into the causes, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of heart and circulatory disease. The website offers health advice to prevent heart disease and practical tips for healthy living.

Tel 0300 3303322
www.bhf.org.uk

Leukaemia Care

Offers a helpline and website which provides support to anyone affected by a blood cancer.

Tel: 08088 010 444
www.leukaemiacare.org.uk

Blood Cancer UK

The charity is dedicated to finding the causes of blood cancers including leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma. It does this through dedicated research focused on finding the causes, improving diagnosis and treatments as well as investment in groundbreaking clinical trials for all blood cancer patients.

Tel: 0808 2080 888
www.bloodcancer.org.uk

Medicines.org

A website run in collaboration with the NHS providing up to date, reliable and understandable information about medicines. A great resource for all medicines.

www.medicines.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support

Offers a comprehensive website with cancer support and information about MPNs, chemotherapy drugs, side effects and how best to manage side effects.

Tel: 0808 808 0000
www.macmillan.org.uk

Stroke Association

Offering help and advice for people and families affected by stroke. The website offers tips on recognising the signs of a stroke as well as the preventative lifestyle measures everyone should consider if at high risk of a stroke.

Tel: 0303 3033 100
www.stroke.org.uk

About this publication and MPN Voice

This document was originally written by Yvonne Francis, an NHS MPN specialist nurse, with input from consultant haematologists, specialist nurses, psychologists and volunteers of MPN Voice.

You may contact MPN Voice by post:

MPN Voice
Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation
The Grain House
46 Loman Street
London
SE1 0EH

or

Email: info@mpnvoice.org.uk

We welcome your feedback. Please write with your suggestions to our postal address or email us at info@mpnvoice.org.uk

You can also contact the Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation at info@gsttfoundation.org.uk or visit their website for more information at www.gsttfoundation.org.uk

MPN voice

MPN Voice is registered under the auspices of Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation.
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Visit the MPN Voice website to find out more about our

- Buddy system
- Medical alert cards
- Regional in-person and online patient forums
- Social media
- Online community of MPN patients
- Funding of some of the latest MPN research

www.mpnvoice.org.uk

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