

## WELLNESS

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## Could daily aspirin help prevent bowel cancer?

BY KARL HILLE  
The Baltimore Sun

Doctors have long recommended daily aspirin for years as a low-cost protection against cancers of the lower bowel.

New research suggests there might not be a dependable benefit for low-risk patients. However, the drug can increase the risk of dangerous bleeding by preventing clotting, according to a report published in the Cochrane Library on Feb. 26.

Lead author Dr. Zhaolun Cai told SciTechDaily, "While the idea of aspirin preventing bowel cancer in the long run is intriguing, our analysis shows that this benefit is not guaranteed and comes with immediate risks."

People with specific genetic markers may benefit from taking aspirin to reduce cancer risk, the National Cancer Society website states. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, including aspirin, are widely used to reduce pain, fever and swelling. Their anti-inflammatory properties led doctors to believe they could help reduce cancer risk, as inflammation is linked to tumor formation and growth.

Researchers from West China Hospital of Sichuan University in China examined 10 medical trials with 124,837 participants. These studies focused on people with an average colorectal cancer risk and tracked whether taking aspirin or other NSAIDs reduced cancer or precancerous polyps.

No qualifying trials for non-aspirin NSAIDs were found, so the reviewers said their conclusions apply only to aspirin.

For the first five to 15 years of use, they found no significant benefit, but some studies suggested a very low likelihood of protection, as seen in follow-up visits 10-15 years later.

On the other hand, the National Institutes of Health reports that the common practice of prescribing low-dose aspirin to prevent stroke does not provide significant protection either. Those findings also found a significant risk of bleeding in the brain or skull after head injuries, as well as a risk of intestinal ulcers.

"My biggest worry is that people might assume that taking an aspirin today will protect them from cancer tomorrow," senior author Dr. Bo Zhang told SciTechDaily. "In reality, any potential preventive effect takes over a decade to appear, if it appears at all, while the bleeding risk begins immediately."

For specific, high-risk groups, including those with inherited Lynch syndrome, the aspirin prescription may work. But the study authors cautioned that any decisions should be made with a physician's help.



Dreamstime/TNS

New research suggests there might not be a dependable benefit for low-risk patients taking daily aspirin as a low-cost protection against cancers of the lower bowel.



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Fertility planning has shifted from the clinic to everyday life.

# How the road to affordable fertility care has led to Costco

BY ALLISON PALMER  
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For most people, understanding their own fertility has never been straightforward. An initial doctor's appointment booked out months in advance. A hard-won referral. Lab work that takes days or weeks to come back. Results explained in clinical language that require several follow-up questions just to understand. For most people, fertility was a conversation that happened to them — in a clinic, on someone else's timeline.

That is still true for many. But the surrounding landscape has shifted in ways that would have been hard to predict even five years ago. Employers have made fertility a standard benefits conversation. New retail partnerships are bringing medication costs down by as much as 80%.

And the tools people are using to understand their own bodies before they ever see a doctor have become meaningfully more capable and more affordable. If Costco announcing a fertility care partnership in March 2026 sounds surprising, that's exactly the point, and it's worth understanding how we got here.

According to the World Health Organization's 2023 report, 1 in 6 people globally (17.5) are affected by infertility, a rate consistent across income levels. That scope, combined with rapidly evolving technology and expanding workplace coverage, has moved fertility from a private, reactive experience to one defined by data, planning, and proactive decision-making.

## THE COST OF FERTILITY CARE AND WHO IS STARTING TO FIX IT

A full IVF cycle in the United States typically costs \$15,000 to \$30,000 including medications,

depending on clinic, location, and individual treatment plan. That is a significant financial commitment, and 28% of employees have gone into debt to cover it.

According to AJMC, \$8.9 billion was spent at US fertility clinics in 2023, with the market projected to reach \$16.8 billion by 2028 — a 13.6% compound annual growth rate. The demand is undeniable. The cost barrier has been equally consistent.

Which is what makes the Costco news significant. In March 2026, Costco, Sesame, and IVI RMA announced a partnership offering members up to 80% savings on fertility medications, with coordinated care access for its 125 million-plus members. This is a signal that fertility care is migrating toward access models that didn't exist even recently and that the pressure to solve the cost problem is now coming from places no one expected.

## EMPLOYER FERTILITY BENEFITS: 42% OF U.S. EMPLOYERS NOW OFFER COVERAGE

The Costco partnership didn't arrive in a vacuum. Employers have been moving in this direction for years. According to the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans, 42% of US employers offered fertility benefits in 2024, up from 30% in 2020. Mercer reports that IVF coverage among large US employers doubled between 2019 and 2023, reaching 45%.

According to Maven Clinic, 66% of employees have taken or considered a new job based on reproductive health benefits, and 64% of employers now describe their fertility coverage as inclusive, meaning it's not gated behind a clinical infertility diagnosis. That detail matters: inclusive coverage opens access

for single women, same-sex couples, and anyone pursuing fertility preservation proactively, without requiring a diagnosis to qualify.

## EGG FREEZING GROWTH: OVER 40,000 CYCLES IN 2023

As access expanded, so did uptake. In 2012, ASRM removed the "experimental" label from egg freezing, opening the door to mainstream adoption. According to SART data reported by Cofertility, over 40,000 egg freezing cycles were performed in the US in 2023, up from approximately 29,000 the prior year — a 39.2% year-over-year increase.

The motivation behind that growth is shifting too. Women under 28 now rank career and education as top priorities and are increasingly treating fertility preservation as a planned life decision rather than a reactive medical one. This reframing from emergency measure to intentional step changes the timing of the conversation, the emotional weight of it, and the financial planning it requires.

## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA CHANGED THE FERTILITY CONVERSATION

Underlying all of this is a cultural shift that came first. Before employers expanded coverage and before Costco entered the picture, everyday women started documenting their fertility journeys publicly — on TikTok, Instagram, and in Facebook groups that functioned as digital support networks.

A December 2025 analysis in ScienceDirect found that 1,905 fertility-related TikTok posts had accumulated over 1.8 billion views and 117 million likes, with 66.82% of creators being patients themselves. The ASRM describes this as a transformation from a private

experience to one shared with candor and courage.

The tradeoff is real though: a June 2025 Fertility Family survey found 53% of people trying to conceive had encountered misinformation online, and 72% said social media made them feel "behind." The community is valuable, but careful discernment is still essential.

## THE TOOLS CAUGHT UP, TOO

At-home hormone tracking devices gave that cultural shift a practical layer. Today's leading options: Inito (four-hormone testing with numerical readouts, price cut 40% in December 2024), Mira (AI-powered, built for PCOS and irregular cycles, Android compatible) and Natural Cycles (the only FDA-cleared digital birth control app, updated in March 2025, integrates with Apple Watch and Oura Ring) — put clinical-grade data in people's hands before a first appointment.

## WHAT THIS MEANS RIGHT NOW

The fertility landscape in 2026 looks fundamentally different from what it did five years ago. Costs are still high, but the Costco partnership, expanding employer benefits, and lower-priced tracking devices are all pushing in the same direction. Egg freezing has gone mainstream. The conversation has come out of the clinic and into everyday life.

For anyone navigating this space, the practical upshot is meaningful: coverage has expanded and is worth examining closely, new access models are emerging, and the data available at home before a first appointment is better than it has ever been.

*Production of this article included the use of AI. It was reviewed and edited by a team of content specialists.*

## A new science-approved trick to help 2 kids play better together

dpa/The Tribune Content Agency

"Play nicely, children!" For kids who don't know each other, a parental instruction like this can be hard to follow.

New research has shown that the way to help children overcome their initial awkwardness and play together is not to tell them to do so, but to give them a shared task.

For the study, 148 6- to 8-year-olds were divided into pairs of friends and non-friends. Each group of two completed two activities: free play and a goal-directed drawing task.

The children's "connectedness" was then measured by recording how much they talked about the same topic. Non-friends showed about 25% higher connectedness in the

goal-directed situation than in free play.

Unstructured free play makes it harder for non-friends to find a consensus, often leading each child to pursue their own play ideas, the researchers said.

The shared goal encouraged them to listen to each other and interact, said Emily Goodacre, who led the research at the University of Cambridge.

There was no such effect

among friends. "Close friends may rely more on non-verbal cues or a shared sense of how to play together, meaning that the goal-directed task did not substantially alter their communication patterns," the university said.

Connected communication is important for social life, the researchers said. "While many children will sit side-by-side using the same toys but essentially play alone, connectedness describes moments when they are actively coordinating their play."

"Connectedness is partly about teamwork, but also

about learning to negotiate with others and respond to somebody else's feelings and needs," Goodacre said in a statement accompanying the study, published in the journal *Infant and Child Development* in late February.

Parents or teachers who want previously unacquainted children to interact cooperatively and positively should give them a shared goal, the researchers concluded. In free play, children first have to struggle to develop a shared idea, whereas a concrete task makes this much easier, they said.