

Cardiac Medications

Medications are important for treating and preventing heart disease as well as its signs and symptoms. For some people, the best treatment is prescription medications rather than a procedure like angioplasty or bypass surgery. You and your doctor will make this decision based on several factors such as your disease, how severe it is, the location of blocked arteries and your specific condition. Even after a cardiac procedure, your doctor most likely will have you take heart medications.

There are many different types of medications that may be used to treat your heart disease. It is very important for you to understand your prescribed medications and the effects they have on your body. Some of the most common classes of cardiac medications are briefly described in this section, including brand names and generic names. You may be taking other heart medications not listed in this manual, or taking these medications for purposes different than those described here. Check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have any additional questions regarding your medications.

Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors may be prescribed for high blood pressure and, more specifically, for patients with congestive heart failure (CHF). ACE inhibitors inhibit the production of certain hormones that increase blood pressure and retain fluid. This allows your circulatory system to work much more efficiently. ACE inhibitors include:

- Captopril (Capoten®)
- Trandolapril (Mavik®)
- Enalapril (Vasotec®)
- Moexipril (Univasc®)
- Lisinopril (Prinivil®/Zestril®)
- Quinapril (Accupril®)
- Benazepril (Lotensin®)
- Ramipril (Altace®)
- Fosinopril (Monopril®)

Angiotensin II Receptor Blockers work much like ACE inhibitors, only they block the hormones that increase blood pressure and cause water retention. Angiotensin II Receptor blockers include:

- Losartan (Cozaar®)
- Valsartan (Diovan®)
- Candesartan (Atacand®)
- Irbesartan (Avapro®)
- Olmesartan (Benicar®)
- Telmisartan (Micardis®)

Renin Inhibitor

- Aliskiren (Tekturna®)

New medication for hypertension that works on the same system as Ace I.

Anticoagulants are most often used to treat blood vessel, heart and lung disease. Sometimes called blood thinners, anticoagulants decrease the blood's clotting ability. When a blood vessel is blocked by a clot, an anticoagulant prevents new clots from forming or the existing clot from enlarging. However, anticoagulants, do not dissolve existing clots. Anticoagulants

include:

- Warfarin (Coumadin®)
- Heparin
- Enoxaprin (Lovenox®)
- Aspirin, Plavix® (Clopidogrel bisulfate), Ticlid® (Ticlopidine) are special anticoagulants called antiplatelet drugs that help prevent platelets from sticking together and forming a clot.
- You may be given antiplatelet medication to help prevent blood clots. You may be also told to take aspirin. **It is very important that you do not stop taking these medications unless advised to do so by your doctor.** Stopping the medication too early could put you at risk for clot formation particularly if you have had a stent. If you develop a rash or allergic symptoms you need to be evaluated by your doctor.

Antiarrhythmics prevent the heart from beating irregularly, as happens with rapid heart rate or fibrillation. They slow the nerve impulses in the heart and make the heart tissue less sensitive. Antiarrhythmics include:

- Amiodarone (Cordarone®, Pacerone®)
- Digoxin (Lanoxin®)
- Diltiazem (Cardizem®)
- Sotalol (Betapace®)

Beta blockers are used in the treatment of angina, high blood pressure, heart attacks and a variety of conditions related to heart disease. Beta blockers reduce the heart's rate and the output of blood, thereby decreasing the workload of the heart and its need for more blood and oxygen. Beta blockers include:

- Metoprolol (Lopressor® or Toprol®)
- Atenolol (Tenormin®)
- Propranolol (Inderal®)
- Carvedilol (Coreg®) – This is a special Beta blocker that helps to improve the pumping action of the heart in heart failure.
- Nebivolol (Bystolic®) – This too is a unique Beta blocker. In addition to controlling heart rate, it also is a vasodialator that decreases blood pressure.

Calcium channel blockers treat and control high blood pressure, angina, and/or some arrhythmias. They relax blood vessels and increase the heart's blood and oxygen supply while reducing its workload. Calcium channel blockers include:

- Diltiazem (Cardizem®, Dilacor® and Tiazac®)
- Nifedipine (Procardia® and Adalat®)
- Amlodipine (Norvasc®)
- Felodipine (Plendil®)

Cholesterol lowering drugs (HMG CoA reductase inhibitors -- better known as statins) lower LDL cholesterol levels. Reducing cholesterol is important in preventing plaque buildup on the walls of blood vessels (atherosclerosis). Statins and other drugs reduce cholesterol levels, stabilize existing plaque (statins only) and prevent heart disease (statins only) progression. Cholesterol lowering drugs include:

Statins:

- Lovastatin (Mevacor®)
- Rosurastatin (Crestor®)
- Atorvastatin (Lipitor®)
- Simvastatin (Zocor®)
- Fluvastatin (Lescol®)
- Pravastatin (Pravachol®)

Triglyceride lowering drugs:

- Fenofibrate (Tricor®)
- Gemfibrozil (Lopid®)
- Niacin (Niaspan®)
- Omega 3 Fatty Acid - Fish Oil (Lovaza®)

Selective cholesterol absorption inhibitor drugs include:

- Ezetimibe (Zetia®)

Combination cholesterol medication:

- Vytorin® (contains Simvastatin (Zocor®) and Ezetimibe (Zetia®))

Digitalis increases the pumping action of the heart and thus the heart's performance. It is used to increase the strength and effectiveness of the heart, and control the heart's rate and rhythm. Digitalis drugs include:

- Digoxin (Lanoxin®)

Diuretics treat such conditions as high blood pressure and heart failure. By increasing the flow of urine, they help the body eliminate excess salt and water. Diuretics include:

- Furosemide (Lasix)
- Hydrochlorothiazide (Hydrodiuril®) or (HCTZ®)
- Chlorthalidone (Hygroton®)
- Triamterene/Hydrochlorothiazide (Dyazide®) or (Maxide®)
- Metolazone (Diulo®/Zaroxolyn®)
- Bumetidine (Bumex®)
- Spironolactone – a special diuretic used most often with patients that have heart failure.

Nitrates treat the symptoms of angina. By relaxing the blood vessels in the body, nitrates reduce the amount of blood that returns to the heart, lessening its work and increasing the supply of blood to the heart. Nitrates can relieve angina attacks, prevent them from occurring or reduce the number of attacks, depending on how and when the medication is taken. Nitrates include:

- Nitroglycerin (Nitro-bid® or Nitrostat®)
- Isosorbide dinitrate (Isordil®)
- Isosorbide mononitrate (Imdur/ISMO)

Remember the 3 Nitro Rule! Take one nitroglycerin spray/tablet, if pain is not relieved in 5 minutes, repeat up to two additional times. If the discomfort is still present after 15 minutes and three nitroglycerin tablets/sprays (one every five minutes), call 911 or have someone drive you to the hospital. Do not drive yourself.

Patient responsibility for medications

- Know your medications. Know the **name** of each one, **why** you take it, **how long** you will take it, the **dosage** and **when** you take it.
- Carry a medication card in your purse or wallet. Keep it up to date. Give a copy to your spouse or close family friend.

- Take your medications as prescribed. **Do not** stop medications or change the dosage without first checking with your doctor.
- Be sure your doctors and pharmacist know all the medications and vitamin supplements that you take in order to avoid drug interaction problems.
- Read the drug information sheets provided by your pharmacist and be aware of possible side effects of your medications. Notify your doctor of any unusual or prolonged symptoms you experience.
- Cue yourself to take your medications. For example, take them when you have a meal, when you brush your teeth, at bedtime, etc.
- Don't share your medications with others -- this could be very dangerous!