

Chapter 2: Medicines

What You Need To Know About Medicines

Tip

Taking your heart failure medicines may help you:

- live longer
- breathe easier
- have more energy
- have less swelling
- stay out of the hospital.

Taking your medicine as directed is very important. If you do, they may help you feel better and help your heart work with less stress. You will need to take medicines for the rest of your life, unless your doctor gives you other directions.

Your health care provider may start you on one or more medicines. He or she may change the dose or add other medicines later. This will depend on your symptoms and how well you respond to the medicines.

It may take many days or weeks to find the right doses, combinations or both of medicines. This will take patience as you and your health care team work together to find the:

- right medicines for you
- right amount of each medicine
- best time of the day to take each medicine.

If you are worried about how to pay for your medicines, talk with your health care provider. There may be less costly medicines you may take, or financial help available to you.

Medicine Dos and Don'ts

Tip

To help you and your family know which medicines you are taking, fill out the medicine chart on page 126.

What to do

- Take your medicine about the same time each day.
- Have all of your medicines filled at one pharmacy.
- Use a pill box or guide to manage your medicines.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible. If you do not remember to take it until it is time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and return to your regular dose schedule.

Do not double up on missed doses unless your health care provider tells you to do so.

- Keep **all** medicines (prescription, over-the-counter, herbals and vitamins) out of reach of children and pets.
- Keep all medicines away from heat, light and humidity. Do not keep medicines in the bathroom or near the kitchen sink.

- Plan ahead for vacations. Don't be caught without enough of your medicines when you are away from home.
- Allow extra time for refills if you use a mail order pharmacy.
- Check with your airline for details about bringing medicines on board.
- If you are seeing more than one doctor, be sure to tell each one which medicines you are taking. (Fill out the medicine chart on page 122 to help keep track.)

What not to do

- Don't let your medicines run out. Call your pharmacy at least 1 week before you need a refill.
- Don't take medicines prescribed for someone else.
- Don't take any more than the prescribed dose of any medicine.
- Don't keep outdated medicine you do not need.
- Don't stop taking your medicines unless you have talked with your health care provider.
- Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice.

Bring Your Medicines To Your Clinic Visits

Put your medicine bottles and boxes into a bag and bring it with you to your appointments.


Include all:

- prescription medicines
- over-the-counter medicines
- herbals
- natural products.

Medicines can work against each other so your health care provider needs to know what you are taking.

How To Read Your Prescription Label

The label on your prescription medicine has a lot of information on it. To learn how to read it, see the label on the next page.

pharmacy name, address and phone number → Allina Health  Allina Health Heart Hospital Pharmacy
920 E 28th St, Ste H2005, MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55407
612-775-3100


prescription number and your name → Rx: 8-0555516-16
Patient Name


how and when to take the medicine → Take 1 capsule by mouth 3 times daily if needed.

name and strength of medicine → **diphenhydramine 25 mg capsule**
Generic for: BENADRYL

number of refills left, number of pills and the name of the company that made the pills → No refills remaining MA/MA
QTY: 30 capsules MFG: SANDOZ

warnings or major side effects → May cause drowsiness. Alcohol may intensify this effect. Use care when operating a vehicle, vessel (e.g., boat), or machinery.
May cause dizziness
May cause blurred vision

what the pills look like → pink and clear colored, oblong shaped capsule with... 

scan code → 

the date of the prescription and your doctor's name → 10/6/2023
Doctor, JaneDoe

CAUTION: Federal law prohibits the transfer of this drug to any person other than the patient for whom it was prescribed.

Prescribed Medicines

☐ Angiotensin Converting Enzyme (ACE) Inhibitors/ ☐ Angiotensin Receptor Blocker (ARB)

Tip

Don't take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) medicines, such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Aleve®, Motrin®) if you are taking ACE/ARB medicines.

☐ Angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitor

ACE inhibitors help relax blood vessels and make it easier for your heart to pump blood. They may help you feel better, have fewer symptoms and live longer.

They are used to treat heart failure, high blood pressure or if you have had a heart attack. ACE inhibitors will help you even if you don't have these problems.

You may have to take ACE inhibitors for several weeks before you notice any changes.

Common ACE inhibitors include:

- enalapril (Vasotec®)
- captopril (Capoten®)
- lisinopril (Zestril® and Prinivil®)
- quinipril (Accupril®)
- ramipril (Altace®).

Side effects

Most people have few side effects from ACE inhibitors. Call your health care provider if you have any of these side effects:

- **dizziness** (especially in the morning). This may be slight if your ACE inhibitor is started at a low dose and slowly increased. Get slowly out of bed or a chair.
- **dry cough that won't go away**. A cough is common with ACE inhibitors. It may decrease once you have been taking the medicine for a while. If the cough is from the medicine, not from the heart failure, your health care provider may lower the dose or switch your medicine.
- **increased swelling** (especially in your lips or throat). This side effect is rare but it is serious.
- **joint or muscle pain**. This is arthritis-like pain that may occur in the legs, hips, knees, shoulders, back or neck.
- **problems with your kidneys**. You will have blood tests done occasionally to watch for any problems.
- **low blood pressure**. Ask your health care provider how often you should have your blood pressure checked.

allinahealth.org/heartfailure

Some side effects may go away as your body adjusts to the ACE inhibitor. If any of these side effects won't go away or if they bother you, call your health care provider:

- headache
- dizziness that lasts for more than 10 minutes or causes trouble walking
- loss of taste or unusual taste
- swelling in your lips and throat
- unusual tiredness.

ACE inhibitors may increase the amount of potassium in your body. Call your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms:

- confusion
- slow, weak pulse
- nervousness
- numbness or tingling in your hands, feet or lips
- weakness in your legs
- irregular heartbeat.

Angiotensin receptor blocker

An angiotensin receptor blocker relaxes your blood vessels and allows your heart to pump easier. You would be prescribed this if you cannot take an ACE inhibitor.

Common angiotensin receptor blockers include:

- losartan (Cozaar[®])
- valsartan (Diovan[®])
- candesartan (Atacand[®]).

Side effects

When you start taking this medicine, you may have an increased chance of retaining potassium. Call your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms:

- confusion
- irregular heartbeat
- feeling nervous
- numbness or tingling in your hands, feet or lips
- weakness or a heavy feeling in your legs.

Call your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms while taking an ARB:

- feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- fever
- sore throat or hoarseness.

Side effects that go away

Side effects that go away after using an ARB include:

- headache
- fatigue
- nasal congestion
- cough.

□ Beta Blockers

Beta blocking medicines block the effects of stress hormones and reduce the workload of your heart. ACE inhibitors and beta blockers work differently so you get the most benefit from being on both medicines.

Beta blockers can improve how your heart works, decrease the need for hospital stays, and help you live longer. They are used to treat heart failure, high blood pressure, heart rhythm problems or if you have had a heart attack.

Beta blockers are started at low doses and are slowly increased.

Common beta blockers used for heart failure include:

- carvedilol (Coreg®)
- metoprolol (Lopressor®, Toprol XL®)
- bisoprolol (Zebeta®).

Before you take a beta blocker, tell your health care provider if you have any of the following:

- asthma
- bronchitis
- emphysema or other lung problems
- diabetes
- kidney disease
- thyroid problems.

Side effects

When you start taking a beta blocker or when the dose is increased, you may feel tired, dizzy, short of breath or have problems with vigorous exercise (such as running or biking, aerobics, or weightlifting).

Get up slowly from a lying or sitting position to avoid feeling dizzy or lightheaded.

When to call your health care provider

If any of these side effects won't go away or if they bother you, call your health care provider:

- feeling lightheaded, dizzy or faint
- shortness of breath, wheezing or problems breathing
- swelling of your feet or lower legs
- weight gain
- slow or irregular pulse
- sexual problems.

□ Digoxin

Digoxin (Lanoxin®) makes your heart pump more efficiently. It can help control an irregular heart rhythm, help you breathe easier and feel better.

If you take antacids that contain aluminum, the effect of digoxin may be decreased. Never double up on doses of digoxin. Call your health care provider if you miss two or more doses.

Side effects

Too much digoxin can cause serious problems, such as a change in your heart rate or a drop in blood pressure. You may need a blood test once in a while to check your digoxin level.

When to call your health care provider

Call your health care provider if you have any of the following while taking digoxin:

- loss of appetite
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or stomach pain
- blurred vision
- yellow, green or white vision

- slow or irregular heartbeat
- drowsiness, confusion or depression
- headache or fainting
- unusual tiredness or weakness
- skin rash or hives.

□ Aldosterone Antagonists

An aldosterone antagonist blocks the effects of the stress hormone aldosterone. When your body makes too much aldosterone, it causes your kidneys keep more sodium and water.

An aldosterone antagonist may help you live longer and reduce your hospital stays.

The aldosterone antagonists used for heart failure are:

- spironolactone (Aldactone®)
- eplerenone (Inspra®).

Side effects

Possible side effects include:

- increased potassium levels. Your health care provider will make sure your potassium level is normal with blood tests.
- enlarged breasts or tenderness in men and women.
- sexual issues, such as impotence or decrease in sexual drive.

□ Hydralazine and Nitrates

Tip

Your doctor *may* add these medicines to treat your heart failure even if you are already taking an ACE or ARB.

If you cannot take ACE inhibitors or ARBs, you may need to take hydralazine and nitrates. When taken together, they relax your blood vessels and decrease how hard your heart has to work to pump blood.

The most common products are: hydralazine (Apresoline®), isosorbide dinitrate (Isordil®), isosorbide mononitrate (IMDUR®) or hydralazine/isosorbide dinitrate combination tablet (Bidil®).

Side effects

Possible side effects when taking these medicines together include:

- dizziness
- headaches

Caution

Do not use Viagra® (sildenafil) with nitrates because the combination will further decrease your blood pressure, which can lead to death.

- flushing (warm, tingling, itchy skin)
- nausea and vomiting.

When to call your health care provider

Call your health care provider if you have any of the following while taking **hydralazine**:

- dizziness
- severe headache or headache that won't go away
- skin blisters
- joint or muscle pain
- skin rash or itch
- fever
- sore throat.

Call your health care provider if you have any of the following while taking **nitrates**:

- dry mouth
- blurred vision
- severe headache that won't go away
- blushed color to your lips or fingernails
- fast pulse.

Side effects that go away

Side effects that go away after using hydralazine include:

- facial flushing or redness
- headache
- loss of appetite
- nausea or vomiting
- constipation.

Side effects that go away after using nitrates include:

- feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- headache
- nausea or vomiting
- flushing of your face or neck.

□ Warfarin

Tip

If you take warfarin, the pain reliever of choice is acetaminophen (Tylenol®).

Warfarin (Jantoven®) is a blood thinner (or anticoagulant) that decreases the ability of your blood to form clots.

You should wear a medical alert bracelet while you take warfarin. Ask your health care provider for information on ordering one.

Precautions

It is important to avoid activities that may cause injury and bleeding.

- Use an electric shaver instead of a blade to avoid cutting yourself when you shave.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush and floss gently to avoid bleeding gums.
- Tell your health care provider if you have a dental or medical procedure planned. You may need to adjust your dosage for a short period of time.

Diet information

While taking warfarin, it is important to watch what you eat and drink. Foods that are rich in vitamin K can affect the way warfarin works in your body. Vitamin K helps your blood make clots while warfarin thins your blood.

Green leafy vegetables (such as broccoli, cabbage, collard greens, spinach, kale and some lettuce) and oils (canola, olive and soybean) have large amounts of vitamin K.

Keep your diet consistent with the amount of vitamin K you eat. This way your body will maintain a steady blood level of warfarin. Talk to your health care provider about a full list of foods that have vitamin K.

Some vitamins (vitamin E), herbs (St. John's wort) and supplements (ginger, ginseng and garlic) can change the effects of warfarin.

Important: Do not add or stop taking supplements while you are taking warfarin unless you have talked with your health care provider.

Check with your health care provider before using any of the following medicines because they will increase your risk of bleeding:

- alcohol
- cimetidine (Tagamet®)
- some antibiotics (such as Septra® or Bactrim® (sulfamethoxazole and trimethoprim), Flagyl® (metronidazole), Diflucan® (fluconazole), Cipro® (ciprofloxacin) or Biaxin® or Biaxin XL® (clarithromycin))
- aspirin
- nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories (Motrin®, Advil®, Nuprin® (ibuprofen); Aleve® (naproxen); and Voltaren® or Cataflam® (diclofenac)).

Side effects

Call your health care provider if you have any unusual bleeding or bruising, abdominal pain that won't go away or dark urine or dark stools.

Other side effects include:

- headache
- dizziness
- weakness
- unusual nosebleeds
- throwing up blood.

Blood test

The international normalized ratio (INR) blood test measures the time it takes your blood to clot. You will need to take this test on a regular basis. The results of the test will tell your health team members if your warfarin dose needs to be changed.

Write your dose of warfarin and the results of your lab tests on your daily log or calendar. Write any missed doses as well.

It is a good idea to wear an identification bracelet that says you take warfarin.

Tip

After you stop taking warfarin, it may take several days before your blood clotting ability returns to normal.

□ Diuretics

Tips

- If you have to go to the bathroom at night, get up slowly so you do not fall.
- Some diuretics may raise blood glucose levels. If you have diabetes, you need to be careful to test your glucose. Report any unusual findings to your health care provider.
- If you take an antacid with aluminum (such as Gaviscon[®]), it may affect how well the diuretic can work. Take the antacid and digoxin at least 2 hours apart from each other.

Diuretics (water pills) help your body get rid of extra fluid. This will reduce the swelling in your feet, ankles, legs and abdomen. Diuretics also help your body get rid of extra fluid in your lungs to make breathing easier.

A diuretic may cause you to go to the bathroom more often and cause a dry mouth. These are signs it is working and not cause for concern.

Take your diuretic early in the morning so it works during the day. This reduces trips to the bathroom at night.

If you take the diuretic two times a day, take the second dose no later than 4 or 5 p.m. (Chew gum or hard candy to help your dry mouth.)

Common diuretics include:

- furosemide (Lasix[®])
- bumetanide (Bumex[®])
- torsemide (Demadex[®])
- hydrochlorothiazide (HydroDiuril[®])
- metolazone (Zaroxolyn[®])
- triamterene/HCTZ (Dyazide[®], Maxzide[®]).

Side effects

Some side effects include:

- **fluid loss (dehydration).** This can make you feel dizzy or lightheaded when you get up from lying down or sitting. Call your health care provider if you feel dizzy.
 - Weigh yourself every day at the same time. Use the same scale. Weigh yourself with the same amount of clothes on.
 - Write down your weight to track if you are losing too much fluid.
 - Bring this log to your clinic visit.
- **potassium loss.** Your body may lose potassium along with fluids. Potassium is needed to keep a good heart rhythm. You may need a blood test to check your potassium level.

Tip

Be sure to wear sunscreen when you are outside on sunny days. Taking a diuretic may make your skin more sensitive to sunlight.

To keep from getting too dizzy or lightheaded, you can:

- Get up slowly.
- Avoid or limit alcohol to one drink a day. One drink is:
 - 4 ounces of wine
 - 12 ounces of beer
 - 1 ounce of hard liquor.
- Avoid standing for a long time.
- Avoid exercise in hot weather.

When to call your health care provider

Call your health care provider if you have the following:

- loss of appetite
- nausea and vomiting
- stomach cramps or diarrhea
- leg cramps.

Call your health care provider if you have the following signs of **low potassium**:

- unusual tiredness or weakness
- thirst or dry mouth
- weak or irregular heartbeat
- muscle cramps or pain
- nausea or vomiting
- constipation.

Over-the-counter Medicines

Caution

Many stores have their own generic brands of medicines. Check with your pharmacist or health care provider before using any over-the-counter and generic medicines. This includes products labeled as herbals.

Read the labels of all over-the-counter medicines you take. Ask your pharmacist or health care provider if they are safe for you.

The safest cough and cold medicines for you are:

- chlorepheniramine (Chlortrimeton® or AllerChlor®)
- guaifenesin with dextromethorphan (Robitussin DM®)
- loratadine (Claritin®).

Cough and cold medicines you should not take:

- pseudoephedrine (Sudafed®, Actifed®, Comtrex® and Nyquil®)
- phenylephrine (Neo-Synephrine®)
- ephedrine (also known as “ma huang”) or any kind of appetite suppressant (such as Metabolife®).

Sodium causes your body to retain fluid. This increases your blood pressure and makes your heart work harder.

The following medicines are high in sodium:

- Vicks 44[®] Cough Syrup, Vicks 44[®] Cough Relief
- Alka-Seltzer[®]
- Fleets[®] Phospho-Soda and Fleets[®] enema.

The following medicines may cause you to retain sodium and fluid:

- ibuprofen (Nuprin[®], Advil[®], Motrin[®] and many brands)
- ketoprofen (Orudis KT[®], Actron[®])
- naproxen (Aleve[®]).

Medicine Interactions

When you take many medicines, they may interact with each other. This means one medicine may affect how well another one works.

Medicines that may affect each other include prescription and over-the-counter medicines.

Ask your health care provider or pharmacist about any possible interactions before you start a new medicine.

Keep Track of Your Medicines

- Keep an updated medicine list in your purse or wallet.
- Consider using a pill organizer.
- Have a plan for organizing your medicine or doses if any of your prescriptions are changed by your doctor over the phone.
- Ask a loved one or friend to help you with your medicines, if you need help.