

Heart Failure: Medicines That Slow the Disease



You will probably need to take more than one medicine to treat heart failure, even if you do not have symptoms.

Medicines do not cure heart failure. But they can slow the disease and help you live longer. They may also control your symptoms so you have more energy and can enjoy life more.

Common medicines for heart failure

Medicines that can control symptoms or help keep heart failure from getting worse include:

- **ACE inhibitors** (such as captopril, lisinopril). These medicines block the action of an enzyme that causes blood vessels to narrow. As a result, they reduce the heart's workload, lower blood pressure, and reduce swelling. They increase your ability to be more active, and they may help you live longer and stay out of the hospital. They may be the only medicine used for fatigue and mild shortness of breath. But in most other cases, they are prescribed along with diuretics and a beta-blocker.
- **Angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARBs)** (such as candesartan, valsartan). ARBs block the action of chemicals in the body that narrow the blood vessels, so they improve blood flow. ARBs can lower the risk of death from heart failure. Your doctor may prescribe an ARB if you cannot tolerate an ACE inhibitor.
- **Aldosterone receptor antagonists** (such as spironolactone). These medicines help block a hormone called aldosterone that can make heart failure worse. They help rid the body of extra fluid, reduce swelling, help you breathe, and lower blood pressure.
- **Beta-blockers** (such as bisoprolol, metoprolol). These medicines can slow heart rate and decrease blood pressure. Beta-blockers help control high blood pressure, prevent heart attacks, and keep your heart rate normal. They may keep heart failure from getting worse and help you live longer.
- **Vasodilators** (such as hydralazine, nitroglycerin). These drugs help widen blood vessels. It is easier for the heart to pump blood if the blood vessels are wider. Vasodilators are often combined with other medicines to treat heart failure. Your doctor may prescribe a vasodilator instead of an ACE inhibitor if you cannot take ACE inhibitors.
- **Diuretics**. Diuretics help rid the body of extra fluid and sodium. This can help relieve swelling that happens because of heart failure.

Your doctor may use a mix of medicines to treat your heart failure. If your heart failure gets worse, your doctor may add new medicines or try different ones. Your doctor may slowly increase the dose of each new medicine until your heart failure improves. You will need to

have regular follow-up appointments and tests to see how your medicines are working.

Each of the medicines for heart failure can cause side effects. If you develop any side effects or any new symptoms that you think might be caused by a medicine you are taking, tell your doctor right away.

Questions to ask your doctor

Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about medicines to slow heart failure: