

Heart Problems: Beta-Blockers



Beta-blocker medicines relax blood vessels and slow your heart rate. They lower the workload on the heart.

Who should take beta-blockers?

Your doctor may prescribe them to:

- Slow the progress of heart failure.
- Lower blood pressure.
- Prevent a second heart attack.
- Slow your heart rate if you have heart rhythm problems.
- Prevent migraine headaches.
- Treat glaucoma.

Precautions

Your doctor will decide if a beta-blocker is right for you. It will depend on your overall health and what other medicines you take.

Your doctor may talk to you about these precautions:

- **Breathing problems.** Beta-blockers can make wheezing worse or may make you short of breath. Talk to your doctor about this, especially if you have asthma.

- **Allergies.** Beta-blockers may cause allergic reactions to be worse and harder to treat.
- **Cold weather.** Beta-blockers may make you more sensitive to cold weather. You may need to dress warmly and limit your time in cold weather.
- **Sun exposure.** Beta-blockers may make you more sensitive to sunlight. You might get sunburnt easily or get a rash. To prevent problems, try wearing sun block, long sleeved shirts, and hats.
- **Your pulse.** Your doctor may ask you to take your pulse regularly to make sure your heart rate is not too slow.
- **Blood sugar levels.** Beta-blockers may cause higher blood sugar levels. If you have diabetes, watch closely for symptoms of low blood sugar, because beta-blockers can hide your symptoms.

Side effects

Ask your pharmacist about the side effects of each medicine you take. Side effects are also listed in the information that comes with your medicine. Common side effects of these medicines include:

- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded.
- Feeling tired.
- Trouble sleeping.

Beta-blocker eyedrops used for glaucoma may have different side effects.

Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. **Call 911 right away** if you think you are having a serious reaction, such as trouble breathing.

Talk to your doctors

Make sure every doctor you see knows about all of the medicines, vitamins, or herbal supplements you take. This means anything you take with or without a prescription.

Tell each doctor about all medical problems you have and what kind of treatment you are getting. Ask if any of the problems you have or

medicines you take will cause a problem with your beta-blockers.

Ask what side effects you need to look for and when to call a doctor.

If you plan to stop your medicine, talk with your doctor first about how to do it safely. Your doctor may want you to slowly decrease your dose.