

Heart Failure: Vasodilators



Vasodilators make blood vessels wider. They are often combined with other medicines to treat heart failure.

Examples

Hydralazine

- Hydralazine
- Hydralazine and nitrate

Nitrates

- Isosorbide dinitrate
- Isosorbide mononitrate
- Nitroglycerin

For heart failure, hydralazine is usually used along with a nitrate. But nitrates may be used alone, without hydralazine, if you are taking it to help with angina symptoms.

How do vasodilators work?

Vasodilators help widen, or dilate, blood vessels. This reduces blood pressure and makes it easier for the heart to pump blood.

Why are these medicines used for heart failure?

When you have heart failure, your heart does not pump as well, so opening narrowed blood vessels is important. This reduces how hard your heart needs to work. It may help keep blood from backing up in your heart and lungs.

How well do they work?

When used with other medicines for heart failure, vasodilators may help relieve symptoms and lower the risk of early death. This benefit has been shown in African Americans but has not been shown in other groups of people.

Side effects

The most common side effect is a rapid drop in blood pressure. This may make you feel dizzy or weak, especially when you stand up. If you already have low blood pressure when you start taking vasodilators, you may need a smaller dose than normal. Your doctor will want to check your blood pressure after you start taking this medicine, to make sure it does not get too low.

When used for a long time, hydralazine could cause fluid to build up in your body. With nitrates, if you take them for a long time, your body may get used to them, and they may not work as well. For these reasons, your doctor may not want you to take them for very long. Nitrates may cause headaches.

Nitroglycerin may not work well if it is old. If your nitroglycerin is past its expiration date, get a new prescription as soon as possible. Usually, you should replace your nitroglycerin pills every

3 to 6 months. The spray form may last up to 2 years before it expires.

Do not use erection-enhancing medicines such as sildenafil (Viagra), tadalafil (Cialis), or vardenafil (Levitra) if you take a nitrate. These

medicines taken together can cause very low blood pressure, which can cause serious problems, including death.