



ADVICE FOR PATIENTS ON HEART MEDICATIONS

 Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
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Galway University Hospitals

Ospidéal na h-Ollscoile Gaillimh

UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL GALWAY
MERLIN PARK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

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Introduction

You have been diagnosed with a heart condition that requires you to take medication. The drugs prescribed for you play an important role in keeping you healthy and helping your heart to work effectively.

It is important for you to:

- › Understand the drugs you are taking.
- › How they work for you.
- › How and when to take them.
- › What side effects they may cause.



General Information

- › Keep all medicines out of children's reach.
- › Store medicines in original container - clearly labelled.
- › Make a list of your medicines including strength, dose and how often they need to be taken.
- › Always bring your medication (or a list of your medication) with you to appointments at the hospital.
- › Keep at least a two week supply of medicines at all times.
- › Check if any medicine is out of date and if so return it immediately to the pharmacy for safe disposal.
- › Only take the medicines that have been prescribed for you. Be wary of mixing them with "over the counter pills" (including herbal remedies). If you are in any doubt speak to your pharmacist or your doctor.
- › If you suspect you are having any side effects from your medicine tell your nurse or doctor. Do not stop taking your medicine.
- › Most medicines do not mix well with excessive alcohol, if in doubt ask for advice.
- › Never take an extra dose. If you suspect that you have missed a dose wait until the next time you are due to take it.
- › Inform your doctor if you become pregnant.
- › **Do not stop taking your medicines unless advised to do so by your doctor or nurse. Most heart medicines are long term or even lifelong treatments.**

Drugs that ease chest pain

NITRATES

Examples: GTN sprays / tablets (for use under the tongue),
Patches (Transiderm Nitro)
Tablets (Imdur)

Tablets and Patches

You have been prescribed this medicine as part of your treatment and you should consider this as a long term treatment. Do not stop this medicine unless advised to do so by your doctor. Do not take tablets for impotence (difficulty with erections) while on nitrate tablets/patches (for example Viagra).

What do they do?

- › These medications work by opening the coronary arteries allowing more blood and oxygen to the heart muscle.
- › Relieve angina pain.
- › Reduce the workload of the heart.
- › Relax and widen veins and arteries.

Possible side effects

- › Headaches (usually disappears with time)
- › Flushing
- › Dizziness



GTN SPRAY

Example: Nitrolingual Glytrin

Angina symptoms include pain in the chest, arms, jaw and gums. You may not experience all of the symptoms together.

Learn to recognise these symptoms and use the following advice regarding your GTN spray to relieve pain quickly.

- › When symptoms start, stop what you are doing and rest.
- › Spray 2 puffs under the tongue and close your mouth (1st dose).
- › Wait for 5 minutes and if symptoms are still present spray 2 more puffs (2nd dose).
- › If symptoms are still present after a further 5 minutes spray 2 more puffs (3rd dose).
- › If symptoms persist after 15 minutes you should seek medical advice immediately - dial 999 or 112.

Always have two sprays available, one at home and another for going out. Always carry GTN spray for immediate relief of angina. Once opened GTN spray should be used within 2 years even if expiry date has not elapsed.

Make sure you do not run out of your GTN spray.

Drugs that lower blood pressure and reduce the workload of the heart

High blood pressure is a warning that the heart and blood vessels are being overworked. If left untreated it increases your risk of having a heart attack or stroke and can damage your eyes and kidneys. It is very important to have your blood pressure checked regularly.



The drugs used in the treatment of high blood pressure will have the added benefit of reducing symptoms of angina and controlling your heart beat.

These drugs work by opening up the blood vessels, thereby reducing pressure on the heart and reducing angina symptoms.

- › **Ace Inhibitors**
- › **Beta Blockers**
- › **Calcium Channel Blockers**
- › **Angiotensin II Antagonists**

ACE INHIBITORS

Examples: Ramipril (Tritace, Ramilo, Ramic); Lisinopril (Zestril)
Enalapril (Innovace); Captopril (Capoten);
Perindopril (Coversyl)

What do they do?

- › Reduce the work of the heart making it easier for it to pump.
- › Lower blood pressure.
- › Relax the arteries.

Ace Inhibitors are prescribed at a low dose, which is then increased over a period of a few weeks until the optimum dose is reached. Before your dose is increased, you should have routine bloods tests carried out.

Possible side effects

- › Dizziness when standing up.
- › Persistent dry cough.
- › Changes in taste.
- › Reduced kidney function.

You have been prescribed this medicine as part of your treatment and you should consider this as a long term treatment.

BETA-BLOCKERS

Examples: Atenolol (Tenormin, Atecor);
Bisoprolol (Emcor, Bisopine, Cardicor);
Carvedilol (Eucardic); Metoprolol (Betaloc); Nebivolol (Nebilet)

What do they do?

- Reduce the risk of a heart attack.
- Reduce the workload of the heart, helping to prevent angina attacks.
- Lower blood pressure.
- Lower heart rate (pulse).

Possible side effects (serious side effects are very rare)

- Tiredness.
- Cold hands or feet.
- Wheeziness (beta blockers may be avoided in people with breathing problems).
- Impotence (difficulties with erections).
- Sleep disturbances / nightmares.

You have been prescribed this medicine as part of your treatment and you should consider this as a long term treatment.

Do not stop this medicine unless advised to do so by your doctor or nurse specialist.

CALCIUM CHANNEL BLOCKERS

Examples: Diltiazem (Tildem, Dilzem);
Amlodipine (Istin);
Verapamil (Isoptin, Verap)

What do they do?

- Reduce blood pressure.
- Relax arteries.
- Some help control angina.
- Some reduce and / or regulate the heartbeat.

Possible side effects

- Flushing.
- Headaches.
- Dizziness.
- Ankle swelling.
- Constipation.
- Nausea.

You have been prescribed this medicine as part of your treatment and you should consider this as a long term treatment.

Do not stop this medicine unless advised to do so by your doctor or nurse specialist.

ANGIOTENSIN II ANTAGONISTS

Examples: Losartan (Cozaar);
Irbesartan (Approvel);
Candesartan (Atacand);
Valsartan (Diovan)

What do they do?

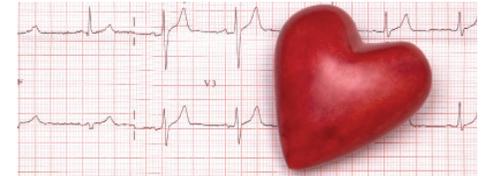
- › Lower blood pressure.
- › Reduce the workload of the heart.
- › Improve the heart pumping action.

Possible side effects:

- › Light - headedness.

You have been prescribed this medicine as part of your treatment and you should consider this a long term treatment. Remind your GP to take kidney function blood tests regularly.

Drugs that help control or correct irregular heart rhythms



For the heart to pump blood to all organs of the body, it needs a regular steady heartbeat. Heartbeat is created by electricity within the heart. If the electricities of the heart are not working properly, you may experience palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness and sometimes pain.

Examples of conditions include atrial fibrillation and ventricular tachycardia. Medicines can be given to correct irregularities of heart rhythm.

Examples: Cordarone, Arythmol, Tambocor,
Digoxin, Isoptin, Sotacor.

AMIODARONE (CORDARONE X)

What does it do?

- › Controls interruptions of the heart rhythm.
- › Helps to keep the heart beat regular.

Possible side effects

- › Headache.
- › Flushing.
- › Dizziness.

- › Stomach upsets.
- › Blue discolouration of the skin with exposure to the sunlight. You should always use sun block and wear a hat and sunglasses when in bright sunshine.
- › It can effect thyroid gland ,liver and lung function. A simple blood test will need to be done at least once a year to monitor this as well as a chest x-ray. Remind your GP about these tests
- › If you are taking warfarin with this medication your GP will monitor your INR (blood clotting test) closely.

You have been prescribed this medicine as part of your treatment. It is usual to start on a higher dose and then the dose is reduced.

DIGOXIN

What does it do?

Slows steadies and strengthens the heartbeat.

Side effects:

- › Over slowing of the heartbeat (less than 50 beats in one minute).
- › Causing weakness, fainting, dizzy.
- › Loss of appetite.

Toxic side effects

- › Too much drug in the blood can cause confusion, low pulse, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting.
- › A simple blood test can determine same.

Important

- › Learn how to check your pulse (ask nurse).
- › If you experience dizzy spells following taking Digoxin, visit your doctor.

Drugs that lower cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fatty 'porridge like' substance that causes blockages of the arteries. If your cholesterol is high (greater than 4.5) or if you have a procedure called:

- › Angioplasty and Stenting
- › By Pass operation

you may be put on a tablet to lower cholesterol.

Examples: Lipostat (pravastatin); Lipitor (Atorovastatin); Zocor (Simvastatin); Lescol (Fluvastatin); Crestor (Rosuvastatin)

Side effects

- › Rash, stomach upset, jaundice.
- › Inform your doctor immediately if you experience muscle pains/tenderness.
- › These medications if taken with certain antibiotics (clarithromycin or Fusidic acid) may cause muscle cramping or very rarely, kidney failure. Your GP will monitor you closely for this.

Important:

Cholesterol is made while you sleep so take your medications just before you go to bed. Your GP will take liver function tests (blood test) 3 months after you start taking Cholesterol medication.

High blood cholesterol levels can be hereditary, therefore it is advisable that other close members of your family should have their cholesterol levels measured.

Do not stop taking medication once your cholesterol level has reduced, this is a result of the medication working effectively.

Drugs that thin the blood

Blood flows more easily in wide open vessels but tends to pool in narrowed arteries causing clotting. Blood thinners prevent clots from occurring, improving blood flow to the heart.

Examples: Aspirin, Plavix and Warfarin.

ASPIRIN

Examples:

Soluble Aspirin - can be swallowed whole or dissolved in water
Enteric Coated Aspirin - Must be swallowed whole.

What does it do?

- › Reduces clot formation (makes blood less 'sticky')
- › Reduces the risk of a further heart attack

Possible side effects

- › Irritation of the stomach lining
(rare- unless you are troubled by an ulcer)
- › Wheeziness (caution in asthmatic patients)
- › Increased risk of bleeding (very rare)

Your cardiologist/surgeon has prescribed aspirin as part of your treatment. The dose prescribed will range between 75 - 300mgs once a day. Take aspirin after you have eaten (never on an empty stomach).

Do not take extra doses - more is not better!

This treatment should be considered long term and should not be stopped unless advised to do so by your doctor or nurse specialist.

If 300mgs is prescribed, it is usually for a short time i.e. 1 month. Your doctor or nurse specialist will tell you when to reduce the dose to 75mgs for long term.

PLAVIX

What does it do?

- › Reduces clot formation (makes blood less sticky)
- › Prevents clot formation within a stent (small metal tube which is sometimes used to keep the artery open when 'balloon angioplasty' is performed).

Possible side effects

- › Increased risk of bleeding

Other side effects reported include:

- › Abdominal (stomach) discomfort
- › Nausea (feeling sick) / vomiting
- › Diarrhoea / constipation
- › Headache / dizziness
- › Skin rash

You have been prescribed this medication as part of your treatment. The dose is 75mgs once daily, taken at the same time each day.

Plavix is important after coronary artery stenting and should be continued for as long as your cardiologist/surgeon stated after the procedure. If you have had a stent inserted, it is essential to stay on it for three months (Bare metal stent) to one year (Drug eluting stent).

Important

It is vital not to stop this medication for any reason, including dental or other surgical procedures without consulting with the Cardiologist that started it. Stopping it early can increase the risk of clot forming within the stent. Typically after a stent, it is prescribed with Aspirin. This medication is sometimes given to patients who cannot take aspirin.

If you suspect that you are experiencing side effects then you must seek medical advice.

Do not stop this medicine unless advised to do so by your doctor or nurse specialist.

WARFARIN

If you have been prescribed this medication a separate information booklet is available.

Drugs that remove excess fluid

DIURETICS (WATER TABLETS)

Examples: Furosemide (Lasix)
Bumetanide (Burinex)
Bendroflumethiazide (Centyl)
Spironolactone (Aldactone)
Co-amilofruse (Frumil)

What do they do?

- › Remove excess body water (relieves breathlessness and swollen ankles)
- › Reduce blood pressure

Possible side effects

- › Lowers blood potassium levels
- › Tiredness
- › Can affect blood sugar level of diabetics
- › Gout symptoms can worsen
- › Some can cause impotence (problems with erections)



You have been prescribed this medicine as part of your treatment and you should consider this as a long term treatment.

Do not stop this medicine unless advised to do so by your doctor. Some diuretics cause low blood potassium and therefore your doctor may arrange blood tests to check the levels. It may be necessary to take a potassium supplement tablet to correct the imbalance. Reduce the salt intake with your diet as this can cause fluid to build up.

If possible avoid taking your diuretic in the evening to prevent disturbed sleep.

If you have been prescribed spironolactone (Aldactone) remind your GP to monitor your blood regularly for kidney function.

Cardiology and Cardiothoracic Department,
University Hospital Galway, Ireland.
Telephone: +353 91 542891