

Taking Medication to Control Heart Failure

Having heart failure means your heart isn't pumping enough blood. Medications can help your heart work better. But they can't do their job unless you take them exactly as directed by your doctor.



Have all your prescriptions filled. Talk to a pharmacist if you have questions. Why Take Your Medications?

- They help you feel better. That means you can do more of the things you enjoy.
- They help your heart work better.
- They can help you stay out of the hospital.

Know Your Medications

You may take one or more of the medications below. Be sure you know which ones you take:

- **ACE inhibitors** lower blood pressure and decrease strain on the heart. This makes it easier for the heart to pump. **Angiotensin receptor blockers** have similar effects. These are prescribed for some patients instead of ACE inhibitors.
- **Beta-blockers** help lower blood pressure and slow your heart rate. This lessens the work your heart has to do. Beta-blockers may improve the heart's pumping action over time.
- **Diuretics** ("water pills") help the body get rid of excess water. This helps prevent swelling. Having less fluid to pump means your heart doesn't have to work as hard. Some diuretics make your body lose a mineral called potassium. Your doctor will tell you if you need to take supplements or eat more foods high in potassium.
- **Digoxin** helps your heart pump with more strength. This helps your heart pump more blood with each beat. So, more oxygen-rich blood travels to the rest of the body.
- **Aldosterone antagonists** help alter hormones and decrease strain on the heart.
- **Hydralazine and nitrates** are two separate medications used together to treat heart failure. They may come in one "combination" pill. They lower blood pressure and decrease how hard the heart

has to pump.

Tips for Taking Your Medication

- Take your medications *exactly* as directed. Follow the directions on the label.
- Take your medications at the same time or times each day.
- **If you miss a dose**, take it as soon as you remember—unless it's almost time for your next dose. If so, skip the missed dose. Do not take a double dose.
- Never change the dose or stop taking a medication unless your doctor tells you.

Call your doctor right away if:

- You have side effects, such as dizziness, nausea, muscle cramps, headache, coughing, swelling, or a skin rash.
- You are gaining weight.
- You miss a dose.