



Healthy Heart Campaign

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You doctor may prescribe a variety of heart medications to treat or prevent heart disease. These drugs may help lower your blood pressure, reduce the level of cholesterol in your blood or help your body get rid of excess fluids that put a strain on your heart's ability to pump blood. Patients with similar diagnosis may use very different medications. Even if the diagnosis or condition of your heart sound similar to a friend's condition, your physical build, general overall health, specific heart condition and how you respond to various medications that cause very different medications to be prescribed.

The following medications can be used alone or in combinations to achieve the best possible response. It may be appropriate for you to take up to four or five medications. In a Healthy Heart Campaign, it is important that you generally know how all your various medications work and their side effects. Commonly prescribed groups of medications are noted below with some of their more commonly reported side effects.

Aspirin helps to lower the risk of a heart attack for those who have already had one. It also helps to keep arteries open in those who have had a previous heart bypass or other artery-opening procedure such as coronary angioplasty. Aspirin may be harmful for some persons, especially those with no risk of heart disease. Your doctor should assess the benefits and risks of taking aspirin. Watch for stomach irritation and blood passing in the stool or a darkened stool. (This side effect is most often seen with larger doses.)

Digitalis makes the heart contract harder and is used when the heart's pumping function has weakened; it also slows some fast heart rhythms. High digitalis blood levels may cause loss of appetite, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, blurred or disturbed color vision (yellowed vision), headache, drowsiness, fatigue, and muscle weakness. Weight loss should always be reported to your prescriber.

ACE (Angiotensin Converting Enzyme) Inhibitors stop the production of a chemical that make blood vessels narrow. This class of medications controls high blood pressure and may be prescribed after a heart attack to help the heart pump blood better. These drugs are also used to treat heart failure (the heart is unable to pump enough blood to supply the body's needs). ACE Inhibitors may cause or increase cough. If coughing is keeping you up at night or interfering with your daily activities, contact your doctor.

Beta blockers slows the heart and makes it beat with less forceful contractions which results in lowered blood pressure. It is used for high blood pressure, chest pain, and to prevent a repeat heart attack. Overtime, beta-blockers improve the heart's pumping ability. Side effects may include dizziness or lightheadedness especially when getting out of bed. Sudden weight gain may be seen after an increase in dose. A gain of three or more pounds in one day or swelling of your feet and lower legs should be reported to your doctor.

Nitrates (including Nitroglycerine) relax blood vessels and stops chest pain by allowing more oxygen to be available to the heart muscle. Side effects may include dizziness, lightheadedness, or fainting when sitting up or standing; fast heartbeat; flushing of face and neck; headache; nausea; vomiting.

Calcium channel blockers relax blood vessels and are used or high blood pressure and chest pain. Common side effects are constipation, nausea headache, rash edema (swelling of the legs with fluid), low blood pressure, drowsiness and dizziness.

Diuretics or "water pills" decrease fluid in the body and are used for high blood pressure. Some diuretics affect your potassium levels more than others and you may need a potassium supplement. This group of medications may increase how often you go to the bathroom. If you take a single dose of diuretic each day, it is usually recommended to take it in the morning. If you take two doses of a diuretic each day, take the second dose no later than late afternoon so you can sleep uninterrupted through the night. Diuretics may also cause dehydration, an excessive loss of water. Sign of dehydration are dizziness, extreme thirst, dry mouth, less urine output, dark-colored urine, or constipation. If you have any of these symptoms, call your doctor. Don't just assume that you need more fluids.

Statins or blood cholesterol-lowering agents decrease LDL (bad) cholesterol levels in the blood. in addition to the common side effects such as headaches,

nausea and fever, two infrequent but potential side effects of statins include extreme muscle pain and disease (statin induced myopathy), and serious liver problems. When you take any statin medication, immediately report any muscle pain.

The above side effects are more frequently reported side effects. You should always completely review the drug information sheet you get with each new prescription. Monitor for side effects more closely in the first weeks of starting a new medication. Whatever group of medications that may be prescribed for you, it is important to realize that if medications are needed, that you should also undertake the lifestyle changes necessary to improve how your heart works. You also need to discuss this with your prescriber. Your lifestyle changes can be just as important as the medications in your healthy heart campaign.

