



Getting the Most Out of Your Medications



When it comes to managing your chronic conditions (especially your heart condition), being on the right medications and taking them the right way become very important. Your prescription medications work by helping your body slow down the progression of the disease and even helping to reverse its course, improving your heart function in the long run.

This guide will help you make the most out of your medications, so that you can focus less on your conditions...and more on enjoying life.

How Your Medications Help You

- ❖ **Directly** - Through the physiologic effects of its active ingredients
- ❖ **Indirectly** - Through your perception of the medication

The way you **think** and **feel** about a medication can change your body's chemistry and **affect the symptoms you experience.**

What This Means for You

Your positive beliefs and expectations of the medications you take can actually help the medication work better. Some people simply don't like taking medications or the idea of it. If this describes you, it may help to apply the way you think about vitamins to your prescription medications, such as telling yourself:

***“Vitamins make me healthier.
My heart medications are also working
to make me healthier.”***

Tips for Taking Medications

- **Never change or skip doses** (even if you think the medication is not working) without consulting your doctor first.
- **Always write down any side effects and concerns** you may have about your medications. Bring that list to your follow-up appointments and show them to your doctor so he or she can work with you to optimize your medication regimen.
- **Use the right tools.** A pillbox, medication chart, or smartphone apps (such as the free **Medisafe Medication Reminder**) can help you easily keep track of medications.
- **Remember that you know your body the best.** While some side effects with new medications are normal and lessons over time, if they become severe or you feel like something is just not right, contact your doctor immediately.

Common Heart Medications & What They Do

Aspirin

How they help:

- ❖ Helps prevent blood clots from forming
- ❖ Helps reduce your chance of having a heart attack or stroke caused by clots

Risks of taking aspirin:

- It can increase your chance of bleeding (such as after an injury) and may cause stomach ulcers

Side effects to watch out for:

- Upset stomach and heartburn (take aspirin with food or milk if this occurs)

Statins

Lipitor, Crestor, Pravachol, Zocor (simvastatin)

How they help:

- ❖ Lowers cholesterol by blocking its production in the liver
- ❖ Improves and prevents heart disease
- ❖ Proven to reduce chances of heart attacks and strokes (even if your cholesterol is already normal)

Side effects to watch out for:

- Muscle aches and cramps

Diuretics (“water pills”)

hydrochlorothiazide, furosemide (Lasix), triamterene/HCTZ (Maxzide)

How they help:

- ❖ Reduces the buildup of fluid in the lungs and body tissues (such as leg swelling)
- ❖ Makes it easier for your heart to pump efficiently
- ❖ Reduces blood pressure

Side effects to watch out for:

- Lightheadedness, weakness, leg cramps

Beta-Blockers

metoprolol (Lopressor, Toprol XL), propranolol, carvedilol (Coreg), atenolol

How they help:

- ❖ Lowers blood pressure and slows heart rate, in turn “relaxing” the heart
- ❖ Helps the heart pump more easily and effectively

Side effects to watch out for:

- Tiredness or lightheadedness

Vasodilators (Nitrates)

nitroglycerin (NTG), isosorbide dinitrate

How they help:

- ❖ Dilates (opens up) your blood vessels and increases the supply of blood and oxygen to your heart
- ❖ Makes it easier for your heart to pump efficiently

Side effects to watch out for:

- Dizziness, headaches, nausea, vomiting
- Taking nitroglycerin in combination with medications for erectile dysfunction can cause a dangerous drop in blood pressure and should be avoided

ACE Inhibitors &

Angiotensin Receptor Blockers

lisinopril, captopril, enalapril, losartan, sacubitril/valsartan (Entresto)

How they help:

- ❖ Relaxes blood vessels so that blood flows more easily to the heart.
- ❖ If you have heart failure, it can slow or prevent your heart from worsening
- ❖ Lowers blood pressure
- ❖ Reduces symptoms of heart failure

Side effects to watch out for:

- Lightheadedness, dry cough, angioedema (a type of allergic reaction)