

Commonly Prescribed Medications for Heart Failure



Hear failure patients will need to take some combination of medications for life. The types and amounts of medications may change over time, but all patients will need an ongoing medication schedule. This section will provide an overview of medications and what heart failure patients may expect. You will have an individualized medication plan. If you have any questions about your medications, please discuss them with your provider.

How do medications help treat heart failure?

The use of medication to treat heart failure has several purposes:

- Protects your heart from stress hormones that can damage the heart
- Helps improve the heart's pumping action
- Reduces how hard the heart muscle has to work
- Helps the body remove extra fluid and sodium

These medications help people with heart failure improve their symptoms, reduce the need for hospital stays and live a longer life.

Medication tips to achieve success:

1. Do not miss doses
2. Refill medications early
3. Check weight and blood pressure daily, if directed by your provider
4. Contact your provider with questions

What medications are commonly used to treat heart failure and why do I need to take so many?

A combination of medications is often used to treat heart failure. The type of medication your doctor will recommend depends on the type of heart failure you have and how severe your symptoms are. The following section summarizes the most commonly prescribed heart failure medications.

These medications can be put into two different classes:

Medication class 1: Medications that improve your chances of living longer and reduce your risk of being hospitalized

When your heart is weak, stress hormones are released in the body that can further damage the heart. These medications reduce symptoms of heart failure and improve heart function.

Type of medication	Medication name	Common side effects
Beta-Blockers	Metoprolol, Carvedilol, Bisoprolol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Dizziness • Wheezing • Increased shortness of breath • Sexual dysfunction
Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme Inhibitors (ACE)	Lisinopril, Enalapril, Ramipril	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cough (ACE only) • High potassium
Angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs)	Losartan, Valsartan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worsening kidney function • Dizziness
Angiotensin Receptor Neprilysin Inhibitors (ARNIs)	Sacubitril-Valsartan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swelling in lips or throat (angioedema) <p>You cannot use these if planning a pregnancy!</p>
Aldosterone Antagonists	Spironolactone, Eplerenone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High potassium • Breast tenderness (Spironolactone only)
SGLT-2 Inhibitors	Dapagliflozin (Farxiga®), Empagliflozin (Jardiance®)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urinary tract infections • Worsened kidney function • Slow healing of foot & leg wounds
Hydralazine and Isosorbide Dinitrate	Hydralazine Isosorbide Dinitrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light headedness • Headache

Your doctor will prescribe medications from all categories listed in this table until you reach doses that have been shown to offer the best benefit for your heart.

For example, your team may start you on Entresto 24/26mg twice daily. Over several weeks, the goal is to gradually increase the dose to find the ideal dose for you. Your provider will increase doses **even if you feel well** because of the long-term benefits they offer your heart. To find the right balance, your provider may need to make adjustments to your dose. They will adjust your medication doses based on your:

- Blood pressure
- Heart rate
- Lab values (blood tests)
- Side effects

To help your care team monitor your health status, you will be required to:

- Keep a log of daily blood pressure, pulse, and weight measurements
- Complete all blood tests
 - You will have frequent lab work ordered for the first few months after you are diagnosed and with medication changes: every 1-2 weeks or more frequently based on your health status.
- Communicate frequently with your providers

Some of these medications lower blood pressure. We will increase these medications even if your blood pressure is “normal” as this can **strengthen the heart** which prevents blood pressure from decreasing.

Medication class 2: Diuretics (also called “water pills”)

When you have heart failure, your body may hold extra fluid. To remove this extra fluid, you may be prescribed diuretics. **Diuretics**, also called “water pills”, help your body remove extra fluid by making you urinate. Decreasing the amount of extra fluid in your body will help improve your heart failure symptoms including: shortness of breath and swelling in your ankles, feet, or belly (abdomen). Unlike the medications listed above, diuretics do not strengthen your heart but they are very helpful in improving your symptoms.

You may be prescribed diuretics from one or both of the following categories:

Type of medication:	Medication name:	Common side effects
Loop Diuretics	Furosemide, Bumetanide, Torsemide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low potassium • Muscle cramps • Dizziness
Thiazide Diuretics	Hydrochlorothiazide, Metolazone	

What are my responsibilities when taking a diuretic?

- Take your diuretic at the same time each day.
- **Do not** take your diuretic before going to bed as this may cause you to get up at night to urinate. To avoid this, try to take your diuretic before **6pm**.
- If you take your diuretic twice a day, take your first dose in the morning and take the second dose 6 to 8 hours later.
- **Do not** skip your diuretic when you are away from home. If needed, adjust your dosing around your trip. You can take your diuretic earlier or wait until after you return home.
- Weigh yourself daily and record on your log.

Potassium and magnesium (also called electrolytes) are often prescribed when you are taking diuretics. They replace the electrolytes you lose because of the water pills. Examples of these supplements include:

Type of supplement:	Supplement name:	Common side effects
Potassium Supplements	K-Dur®, K-Lyte®, K-Lor®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nausea • Vomiting • Diarrhea • Abdominal discomfort
Magnesium Supplements	Mag-Ox®, Maox®, Uro-Mag®	

Other medications that might be prescribed

Your doctor may also prescribe other medications depending on your symptoms and additional health problems.

These medications include:

Type of medication	Medication name	Common side effects
Cardiac glycoside	Digoxin	Excessive amounts may cause <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nausea or vomiting• Blurred or colored vision• Abnormal heart rhythm
I _f channel blocker	Ivabradine (Corlanor®)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low heart rate• Flashes of bright colors that may appear in your field of vision
Soluble Guanylate Cyclase (sGC) Stimulator	Vericiguat (VERQUVO®)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low blood pressure• Dizziness

What can I do to manage the risks of medication side effects?

Sometimes a medicine can cause unwanted effects. These are called **side effects**. Below is a list of some of the side effects (but not all) for your heart failure medicines and what to do if you experience them. It is important to talk to your healthcare provider if you are experiencing any of these side effects.



Side Effect	What action should I take?
Dry cough	Talk to your provider about switching to another medication.
Dizziness	Monitor your blood pressure and weight daily. Change positions slowly .
Fatigue	Talk to your provider. They may need to make changes in your dose. Fatigue may go away after your medication is adjusted.
Shortness of breath	Call your provider. This may be a medication side effect or a symptom of your heart failure.
High or low potassium blood levels	Schedule regular checkups with your provider so they can check your blood lab values. Diuretics make your body lose potassium. You will have a blood test to check your potassium level and to determine if you need to take potassium pills.
Worsening kidney function	Schedule regular checkups with your provider so they can check your lab values to monitor how your kidneys are working. Monitor your weight daily.
Breast tenderness	Talk to your provider. They may need to switch your medication.
Swelling in lips or throat (angioedema)	Call 911 immediately.

What medications should I avoid?

There are some over-the-counter (OTC) medications that may cause problems for a person with heart failure. Examples of medicines that should be avoided are listed on the following page:

- **Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs):**

NSAIDs (over the counter medication used for pain) can worsen heart failure and decrease kidney function. Examples of NSAIDs include ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®), naproxen (Aleve®, Naprosyn®). We recommend taking acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for pain.

Please note: Aspirin is an NSAID, but you may use if prescribed by your provider.

- **Antacids:**

These medications are high in sodium and may increase buildup of water in the body. They can also decrease the effectiveness of your heart failure medication.

- **Decongestants:**

Decongestants for coughs and colds can increase your blood pressure or heart rate. Please discuss with your provider before taking.

- **Alternative or Herbal supplements:**

A few that you may have heard of are ginkgo biloba, ginseng, echinacea and valerian root. These drugs may interfere with the action of your heart failure medications and may have other harmful effects. Please discuss with your provider before taking them.

