

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:

- 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 to 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
4. Contact your provider with questions

What medications are commonly used to treat heart failure?

A combination of medications is often used to treat heart failure. 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 maintain how well your heart pumps (squeezes)

When your heart is weak, stress hormones are released in the body that can further damage the heart. These medications **block** these stress hormones from further damaging the heart.

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• Worsening kidney function• Dizziness• Swelling in lips or throat (angioedema) You cannot use these if planning a pregnancy!
Angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs)	Losartan, Valsartan	
Angiotensin Receptor Nephilysin Inhibitors (ARNIs)	Sacubitril-Valsartan	
Aldosterone Antagonists	Spirolactone, Eplerenone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High potassium• Breast tenderness (Spirolactone only)

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

For example, your team may start you on lisinopril 2.5mg daily. Over several weeks, the goal is to gradually increase the dose to lisinopril 40mg daily. 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: 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 abdomen (belly). 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.

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 often goes 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 you 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 below:

- **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 continue to use if your provider prescribed it previously.

- **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.

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