

My Responsibilities When Taking Diuretics

For Left Ventricular Assist (LVAD) Patients

Why are diuretics used for heart failure?

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).

What are the different types of diuretics?

There are two main types of diuretic medications that may be included in your heart failure management. Your provider will determine the best diuretic for you.

- **Loop diuretics:** Reduces your swelling and is your primary diuretic. Examples of loop diuretics include:
 - Bumetanide (Bumex®)
 - Furosemide (Lasix®)
 - Torsemide (Demadex®)
- **Thiazide diuretics** (also known as “booster” diuretics): These may be given in combination with loop diuretics to help them work better. They may also be used for reducing blood pressure. Your provider will discuss with you whether a “booster” diuretic is needed. Examples of thiazide diuretics include:
 - Metolazone (Zaroxolyn®)
 - Hydrochlorothiazide (Microzide®)
 - Chlorthalidone

What are the common side effects of diuretics?

Sometimes a medicine can cause unwanted effects. These are called **side effects**. Some (but not all) of the side effects for diuretics are listed here. Talk to your provider or pharmacist for more information.

Side effects may include:

- Low potassium levels (too little potassium in the blood) resulting in:
 - Muscle cramps, weakness or pain
 - Confusion
 - Irregular heartbeat

- Dehydration (too much fluid is lost from the body) resulting in:
 - Dizziness or lightheadedness
 - Headaches
 - Muscle cramps or pain

What if I take too much diuretic?

If you take too much of a diuretic, it can cause you great harm. Overdosing or taking too many diuretic medications can lead to very low amounts of water (dehydration) and electrolytes (potassium and sodium) in your body. You may experience the following side effects:

- A fast or irregular heartbeat
- Nausea, vomiting
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Low blood pressure
- Muscle cramps

If you experience any of these side effects, call the Center for Circulatory Support office at **(734) 615-3068** Monday – Friday between 8am-5pm.

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. 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.

What do I do if I miss a dose of my diuretic?

- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember.
- If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose. Go back to your normal time.
- **Do not** take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

What precautions should I follow?

- Schedule regular checkups with your provider so they can check your blood lab values and monitor how your kidneys are working.
 - Diuretics make your body lose potassium which is an electrolyte needed by your body. You will have a blood test to check your potassium level and to determine if you need to take potassium pills.
- Monitor your heart failure symptoms daily. If you notice any of the symptoms below, call your provider right away. They may need to make changes in your diuretic dose.
 - Shortness of breath with activity
 - Increased swelling in your ankles, feet or abdomen
 - Weight gain: 2 or more pounds in 1 day, or 4 pounds or more in 1 week

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