

# Medications Used to Treat Heart Arrhythmias

There are many medications that are used to treat, prevent or lessen the severity of irregular heart rhythms (arrhythmias). This group of medications are called **antiarrhythmics**.

## How do antiarrhythmics work?

Antiarrhythmics work by slowing the electrical impulses in the heart so that your heart can return to a regular rhythm. Your healthcare providers can tell you the purpose of your specific prescriptions. Your medications will likely fall into the categories described in the table below.

Medication type:	How do they work?
Beta Blockers	Slow the heart rate and also block harmful hormones (such as adrenalin) that may cause irregular heart rhythms.
Calcium Channel Blockers	Used to slow the heart rate by preventing calcium from entering the cells of the heart
Potassium Channel Blockers	Used to slow the electrical impulses in the heart by preventing potassium from entering the cells of the heart.
Sodium Channel Blockers	Used to slow electrical conduction in the heart by preventing sodium from entering the cells of the heart.

## What are my responsibilities when taking an anti-arrhythmic drug?

- Follow all directions on your prescription labels.
- Take your medication at the same time each day.
- Do not miss a dose of your medication.
- If you're taking an extended-release tablet, be sure to swallow the pill whole don't break, chew, or crush it.
- Get your prescription refilled before you run out of medicine completely.
- Talk to your healthcare provider or a pharmacist before starting any new medications.

## What do I do if I miss a dose?

Take the medicine as soon as you can, but skip the missed dose if it is almost time for your next dose. Do not take two doses at one time.

## Common antiarrhythmic medications

Here is a table of the most common antiarrhythmic medications prescribed and important information you should know:

<b>Beta Blockers</b>			
<b>Medication names:</b>	<b>What are the possible side effects?</b>	<b>What should I monitor for?</b>	<b>What else should I know when taking this medication?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bisoprolol Brand name: Zebeta®</li> <li>• Carvedilol Brand name: Coreg®</li> <li>• Metoprolol Brand names: Toprol® or Lopressor®</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May lower your heart rate and blood pressure. If you feel lightheaded or dizzy, tell your doctor.</li> <li>• You may feel tired and weak when you start taking this medicine, but this will stop if you continue to take it.</li> </ul>	<p>Check your heart rate and blood pressure if directed by your doctor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take these medicines as prescribed by your doctor.</li> <li>• Take carvedilol with food.</li> <li>• Metoprolol and bisoprolol can be taken with or without food.</li> </ul>

<b>Calcium Channel Blockers</b>			
<b>Medication names:</b>	<b>What are the possible side effects?</b>	<b>What should I monitor for?</b>	<b>What else should I know when taking this medication?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diltiazem Brand names: Cardizem CD®, Cardizem LA®, Cardizem®</li> <li>• Verapamil Brand names: Calan®, Calan SR®</li> </ul>	<p>Dizziness, headache, or constipation may occur.</p>	<p>Check your heart rate and blood pressure if directed by your doctor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not crush or chew extended release products.</li> <li>• Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice.</li> </ul>

<b>Potassium Channel Blockers</b>			
<b>Medication names:</b>	<b>What are the possible side effects?</b>	<b>What should I monitor for?</b>	<b>What else should I know when taking this medication?</b>
Amiodarone Brand name: Pacerone®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nausea may occur if taken on an empty stomach.</li> <li>• Slow heart rate or low blood pressure can occur.</li> <li>• Your skin may be more sensitive to the sun.</li> <li>• This medication can affect your thyroid, liver, lungs, and eyes. We will monitor you closely to be sure it is safe to continue taking this medication.</li> </ul>	<p><b>To Start:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eye Exam</li> <li>• Chest X-ray</li> <li>• Liver function test (blood draw)</li> <li>• Lung function test</li> <li>• Thyroid function test (blood draw)</li> </ul> <p><b>Every 6 months:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liver function test (blood draw)</li> <li>• Thyroid function test (blood draw)</li> </ul> <p><b>Yearly:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lung function test</li> <li>• Chest X-ray</li> <li>• Eye exam</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take with food to avoid nausea.</li> <li>• Use sunscreen when outdoors.</li> <li>• Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice.</li> <li>• Many drugs can interact with amiodarone. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the current medicines you are taking or plan to take.</li> <li>• Taking warfarin (Coumadin®) with amiodarone may increase the effect of warfarin. Tell the doctor or pharmacist who manages your warfarin that you are taking amiodarone.</li> </ul>

Medication names:	What are the possible side effects?	What should I monitor for?	What else should I know when taking this medication?
Dofetilide Brand name: Tikosyn®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This medication can interact with several other medications.</li> <li>• Talk to your healthcare provider or a pharmacist prior to starting any new medications.</li> <li>• This medication can cause ventricular arrhythmias if not taken correctly.</li> </ul>	<p><b>To start:</b>            You will be in the hospital for 4 days for lab tests and EKG monitoring.</p> <p><b>Every 3-6 months:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EKG</li> <li>• Kidney function test, potassium level and magnesium level (blood draws)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take every 12 hours with or without food.</li> <li>• If you miss more than one dose of dofetilide, you may have to be re-admitted to the hospital.</li> </ul>
Dronedaronone Brand name: Multaq®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nausea may occur if taken on an empty stomach.</li> <li>• This medication may affect your liver function.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Every 6 months:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liver function test (blood draw)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take with food to avoid nausea.</li> <li>• You must use effective birth control while taking this medication.</li> <li>• Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice.</li> <li>• Many drugs can interact with dronedaronone. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the current medicines you are taking or plan to take.</li> </ul>

<b>Medication names:</b>	<b>What are the possible side effects?</b>	<b>What should I monitor for?</b>	<b>What else should I know when taking this medication?</b>
Sotalol Brand name: Betapace®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow heart rate, low blood pressure, or lightheadedness can occur.</li> <li>• Talk to your healthcare provider or a pharmacist before starting new medications.</li> <li>• May cause ventricular arrhythmias if not taken correctly.</li> </ul>	<p><b>To start:</b> You will be in the hospital for 4 days for lab tests and EKG monitoring.</p> <p><b>Every 6 months:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EKG</li> <li>• Kidney function test, potassium level, and magnesium level (blood draws)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take every 12 hours.</li> <li>• To lower the chance of being dizzy, change positions slowly.</li> <li>• Take with or without food.</li> <li>• Do not take antacids that have aluminum or magnesium in them within 2 hours of taking this medicine.</li> </ul>

<b>Sodium Channel Blockers</b>			
<b>Medication names:</b>	<b>What are the possible side effects?</b>	<b>What should I monitor for?</b>	<b>What else should I know when taking this medication?</b>
Mexiletine	May cause lightheadedness or nausea.	Your liver function may be checked periodically.	Take with food to avoid nausea
Disopyramide Brand name: Norpace®	May cause dry mouth, constipation, and urinary hesitancy.	<p><b>Every 6 months:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EKG</li> <li>• Kidney function test (blood draw)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take on an empty stomach.</li> <li>• Many drugs can interact with disopyramide. Tell your doctor about all your current medicines and any you start or stop using.</li> </ul>

<b>Medication names:</b>	<b>What are the possible side effects?</b>	<b>What should I monitor for?</b>	<b>What else should I know when taking this medication?</b>
Propafenone Brand names: Rythmol®, Rythmol SR®	May cause lightheadedness or nausea.	EKG will be checked periodically in clinic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take with or without food.</li> <li>• Do not chew, open, or crush long acting pills (SR).</li> <li>• Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice.</li> <li>• Many drugs can interact with propafenone. Tell your doctor about all your current medicines and any you start or stop using.</li> </ul>
Quinidine	May cause lightheadedness, nausea, or blurred vision.	<b>Every 6 months:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EKG</li> <li>• Kidney function test (blood draw)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice.</li> <li>• Many drugs can interact with quinidine. Tell your doctor about all your current medicines and any you start or stop using.</li> </ul>

<b>Other medications that treat arrhythmias</b>			
<b>Medication names:</b>	<b>What are the possible side effects?</b>	<b>What should I monitor for?</b>	<b>What else should I know when taking this medication?</b>
Ranazoline Brand name: Ranexa®	May cause headaches, lightheadedness, and dizziness.	<b>To Start:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EKG</li> <li>• Kidney function and EKG may be checked periodically in clinic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To prevent dizziness, change positions slowly.</li> <li>• Take with or without food.</li> <li>• Swallow whole. Do not chew, break, or crush.</li> <li>• Many drugs can interact with ranolazine. Tell your doctor your current medicines and any you start or stop using.</li> <li>• Do not drink grapefruit juice.</li> </ul>

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