

Session 6: Cardiac Medications/Pharmacology

Your doctor may prescribe medications to you after you've had a cardiac event. You may also be on some of these medications if you've been determined to be at high risk of a heart event.

It will be important for you to know what medications you're taking and why you're taking them. Also, understand how and when to take them, and what to do if you forget a dose. Ensure you're following your own personal medical plan set for you by you and your doctor.



- Never use medications prescribed for someone else
- Never allow others to use your medications
- It's dangerous to mix drugs or try to prescribe medication yourself
- Consult your doctor before making any changes in your medication plan
- Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions about your meds

****The information below is general and not meant to substitute information given to you by your physician or pharmacist****

Before reading this section, please fill out your medication list below:

Name of Medication	Dosage	Times taken per day

*If you need more space, feel free to make a copy of this chart

Why do I have to take medications?

Medications can be a very important part of managing a chronic illness. They won't cure the disease, but they're used to help keep the disease under control. Medications usually have a purpose:

1. To relieve symptoms (like pain medications, or an asthma inhaler)
2. To prevent further problems (like blood thinners to help prevent a stroke)
3. To improve disease or slow its progress (such as heart medications)
4. To replace substances/hormones that are normally produced by the body (such as insulin or thyroid medications)

*Adapted from Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions (2007), 2017

There are several medications available to treat different heart conditions. Your physician will work with you and other health care providers to help you with taking the most appropriate medication for you. Side effects can be minimized by proper monitoring by the physician, pharmacist, and you as patient. Ask questions and become a key player in your heart health.

General Guidelines

Cardiac medications will most often be prescribed to:

- Improve blood and oxygen supply to the heart muscle
- Reduce the work load of the heart
- Reduce the risk of blood clots forming in the blood vessels
- Reduce the production of cholesterol by the body



At the Doctor's Office

Follow your doctor's instructions on the dosage of prescribed medications. If you see more than one physician, such as a cardiologist, dentist, optometrist or others, be sure that ALL of them are aware of your prescribed medications. Carry a medication list with you, so you can show the health care providers you see.

At the Pharmacy

Ask for the name of your medication – both the name brand and generic name. Check with your pharmacist if you're not sure how to take your medications (with or without food, or at morning or night, for example). Make sure you tell your pharmacist about ALL the medications you take, including non-prescription or over-the-counter medications, dietary supplements and any herbal or alternative medications, since these may interact with your prescribed medications. If you find it hard to keep track of your medications or remember when to take them, ask your pharmacist about having your medications put into a blister pack.

Common Cardiac Medications

Classification / Name		Action	Precautions / Warnings
Anti-Platelets	ASA (Aspirin)	These drugs, also known as “blood thinners,” decreases the stickiness of the platelets. This helps keep blood flowing more smoothly in your body. Lessens risk of heart attack and stroke.	Avoid taking with alcohol. Stopping could lead to sudden stent blockage.
	Plavix (Clopidigrel)		
Beta Blockers	Lopressor (Metoprolol) Tenormin (Atenolol) Monacor (Bisoprolol) Coreg (Carvedilol) Socetar (Satalol) Inderal (Propranolol)	Lowers heart rate and blood pressure, and makes the heart workload easier.	Never double up a missed dose. Must be tapered gradually.
	Ends in “-lol”		
ACE Inhibitors & ARBs	ACE Inhibitors Altace (Ramipril) Vasotec (Enalapril) Inhibace (Cilazapril) Capoten (Captopril) Monopril (Fosinopril) Coversyl (Perindopril) Accupril (Quinapril) Ends in “-pril”	This drug causes the blood vessels to relax, lowering the blood pressure, increasing the supply of blood and oxygen to the heart and other vital organs, and lowers the risk of heart failure. The drugs also help to rid the body of excess accumulations of salt and fluids by increasing blood flow to the kidneys.	Common side effects of ACE Inhibitors are dry cough and headaches. See your doctor if you develop hives, lightheadedness, dizziness, or irregular heartbeat that you don't normally have.
	ARBs Atacand (Candesartan) Avapro (Irbesartan) Cozaar (Losartain) Diovan (Valsartan) Teveten (Eprosartan)		
Classification / Name		Action	Precautions / Warnings

<p>Cardio-tonics</p>	<p>Lanoxin (Digoxin)</p>	<p>Used to treat heart failure. Digoxin increases the force with which the heart beats, therefore increasing the amount of blood pumped out per heartbeat, improving the efficiency of the heart.</p>	<p>Contact your doctor immediately if you have loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, vision changes, irregular heartbeat, changes in pulse rate, confusion, headache or fainting.</p>
<p>Statins</p>	<p>Lipitor (Atorvastatin) Crestor (Rosuvastatin) Zocor (Simvastatin) Pravachol (Pravastatin) Mevacor (Lovastatin) Lescol (Fluvastatin)</p> <p>Ends in “-statin”</p>	<p>Reduces cholesterol, stops plaque from building up; however, it doesn’t get rid of what’s already there.</p>	<p>Cholesterol reduction is most effective when combined with a low-fat diet and regular exercise.</p> <p>Liver functions must be monitored by your physician when taking anti-cholesterol medication.</p> <p>Don’t eat or drink grapefruit while taking cholesterol medications. The fruit can dramatically increase the potency and absorption of the drug. It could cause serious liver or muscle damage.</p>
<p>Nitrates</p>	<p>Nitro (Nitroglycerin) Isodril (Isorbide Dinitrate)</p>	<p>Causes direct relaxation of the smooth cardiac muscles, decreases chest pain.</p> <p>They’re not a cure but they can decrease the symptoms of angina and allow you to be more active.</p>	<p>If prescribed, have your nitro with you at all times. Make sure your family members know where your nitro is kept.</p> <p>**Don’t take Viagra or any other erectile dysfunction drugs if you’re prescribed nitrates **</p>

Classification / Name	Action	Precautions / Warnings
<p>Calcium Channel Blockers</p>	<p>Adalat (Nifedipine) Cardizem (Diltiazem) Isoptin (Verapamil) Norvasc (Amlodipine) Plendil (Felodipine)</p>	<p>**Don't eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while taking calcium channel blockers**</p> <p>Avoid alcohol, as the interaction can increase the side effects.</p> <p>Other medications you're taking may interact with the calcium channel blocker – make sure your doctor knows about ALL your medications.</p>
<p>Diuretics</p>	<p>Chlorthalidone</p> <p>Ethacrynic acid (Edecrin®)</p> <p>Furosemide (Lasix®)</p> <p>Hydrochlorothiazide</p> <p>Indapamide (Lozide®)</p> <p>Metolazone (Zaroxolyn®)</p>	<p>Also known as “Water Pills.”</p> <p>These drugs help the body rid itself of excess sodium (salt) and water by helping your kidneys produce more urine.</p> <p>It's easier for the heart to pump without the extra fluid.</p> <p>They're often used to treat high blood pressure and heart failure.</p> <p>Other medications you're taking may interact with the diuretic – talk to your doctor or pharmacist about ALL your medications, even non-prescription ones</p> <p>Limit your salt intake while taking diuretics</p> <p>Take at least 6 hours before going to bed, so you don't have to get up through the night to use the bathroom</p>
<p>Anti-coagulants</p>	<p>Apixaban (Eliquis®)</p> <p>Dabigatran (Pradaxa®)</p> <p>Rivaroxaban (Xarelto®)</p> <p>Warfarin (Coumadin®)</p>	<p>Also known as “Blood Thinners.”</p> <p>Don't actually “thin” the blood, but help to prevent new clots from forming, or prevent existing clots from getting bigger</p> <p>You'll likely need regular blood tests to monitor the viscosity (thickness) of your blood, so it's not too thin or too thick.</p> <p>Avoid smoking and limit alcohol while taking anti-coagulants.</p> <p>Main side effect is unwanted bleeding – keep an eye on pink in the sink when brushing your teeth or shaving, nosebleeds, stool that's red or black, urine that's pink or brown</p>

If you have further questions about any of the medications you're taking, you can always ask your health care professional about the MedsCheck Program.

MedsCheck is a program that allows you to schedule a 20- to 30-minute one-on-one meeting with your pharmacist to ensure that you're safely and appropriately using your medications. **And it's free!** Just bring your OHIP (Health) Card to the appointment. The MedsCheck appointment is your chance to discuss how your prescription, over-the-counter, and alternative medicines may be affecting each other.



Do I qualify?

- You must be an Ontario resident with a valid Ontario Health Card and be currently taking a minimum of 3 prescription medications for a chronic condition.
- You're eligible for one MedsCheck session per year from the date of original review.
- You're eligible for a MedsCheck follow up within the annual time frame, with the following criteria:
 1. You've been discharged from the hospital within the previous two weeks
 2. A pharmacist's documented decision based on:
 - i. Significant changes made to an existing medication profile or the addition of new medication
 - ii. Documented evidence of non-compliance
 - iii. You've changed your place of residence and have transferred your prescriptions to a different pharmacy
 3. A referral from a physician (MD) or a nurse practitioner (NP)
 4. A planned hospital admission

After you've completed the MedsCheck session, you'll be provided with a drug review list that is dated and authorized with yours and the pharmacist's signatures; the review list is important when you interact with other health care providers.

** Taken from Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care www.ontario.ca/medscheck, 2017

Medications and Travel

- When travelling, be sure you carry your medications with you in your carry-on bag
- If you'll be away from home for an extended period of time, contact your pharmacist to see how you can refill your prescription while you're away.
- Prescriptions must be in the original container, with the medication name and the traveler's name clearly stated.
- Bring an up-to-date medication list with you and keep it in your wallet or purse, in case of any medical emergency while you're away from home.
- If you're travelling internationally, check into health insurance coverage, especially if you've recently had a heart attack.



Session 6: What Have I Learned So Far?

1. Name a medication you're currently taking:

2. Why were you prescribed this medication?

3. What are two things you should remember when travelling while taking medications?

4. Name another medication you're currently taking:

5. Why were you prescribed this medication?

6. Name the program where you can meet with a pharmacist to ensure you're taking your medications properly?
