



What Is High Blood Pressure Medicine?

Your doctor has prescribed high blood pressure medicine to help lower your blood pressure. You also need to make the other changes that are effective: stay at a normal weight, use less salt, be more physically active and limit alcohol to no more than one drink a day for women or two drinks a day for men. Follow your overall therapy plan, and you can be on the road to a healthier life!



Taking your medicine the way your doctor tells you to is the key to getting your blood pressure down where it belongs!

What should I know about taking medicine?

- Your doctor may prescribe one or more drugs to bring your blood pressure down to normal.
- The medicines work in different ways to help lower blood pressure.
- Medicine only works when you take it regularly.
- Don't ever stop taking medicine on your own.
- Even after your blood pressure is lowered, you may still need to take medicine — perhaps for your lifetime — to keep your blood pressure normal.

How can I remember to take my medicine?

Sometimes it's hard to keep track of your medicine. But to be safe, you must take it properly. Here are some good ways:

- Take your medicine at the same time each day.
- Take medicine along with meals or other daily events, like brushing your teeth.
- Use a weekly pill box with separate compartments for each day or time of day.
- Ask family and friends to help remind you.
- Use a medicine calendar.
- Leave notes to remind yourself.

What types of drugs are there?

- **DIURETICS** rid the body of excess sodium (salt) and water and help control blood pressure.
- **BETA BLOCKERS** reduce the heart rate and the heart's output of blood, which lowers blood pressure.
- **VASODILATORS, ANGIOTENSIN-CONVERTING ENZYME (ACE) INHIBITORS, ANGIOTENSIN II RECEPTOR BLOCKERS (ARBs) and CALCIUM CHANNEL BLOCKERS** are drugs that relax and open up the narrowed blood vessels and lower blood pressure.

What are their side effects?

For many people, high blood pressure medicine is truly a blessing. It can effectively lower your blood pressure, but some types may cause side effects. Tell your doctor if you have side effects, but don't stop taking your medicine on your own to avoid them. Here are some of the side effects that may occur:

- Weakness, tiredness or drowsiness
- Impotence
- Cold hands and feet
- Depression or sluggishness
- Trouble sleeping or nightmares
- Slow or fast heartbeat
- Skin rash
- Loss of taste or dry mouth
- Dry, constant cough; stuffy nose or asthma symptoms
- Ankle swelling, leg cramps or aches in the joints
- Headache, dizziness or swelling around the eyes
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Fever or anemia

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.
3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- **Chest discomfort**
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body**
- **Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort**
- **Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness**

Warning Signs of Stroke

- **Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body**
- **Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding**
- **Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes**
- **Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination**
- **Sudden, severe headache with no known cause**

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 ... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

Should I avoid any foods or medicines?

What reactions or side effects should I expect?

Your contribution to the American Heart Association supports research that helps make publications like this possible.

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update at americanheart.org/statistics.*

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