



HYPERTENSION MEDICATIONS

If you have high blood pressure (hypertension), you may need to take medications to help lower your blood pressure. People with hypertension who take blood pressure medications daily are much less likely to have a heart attack or stroke. You will get the most from your medications when you take them as prescribed. You can also help your medications work more effectively by making healthy choices. Taking steps to control your weight, to be physically active, to quit smoking, to eat foods lower in sodium, and to limit or eliminate alcohol can help lower your blood pressure.

What is hypertension?

Hypertension is a condition of higher than normal blood pressure. Blood pressure is a force that is exerted by your blood upon the walls of your blood vessels. This force, or pressure, enables blood to pump effectively throughout your body and everyone needs a certain amount of pressure to make this process possible. When the force of blood against your artery walls is too strong, however, you have high blood pressure, or hypertension.

When you have hypertension, your heart has to work harder than it should to send blood throughout your body. By lowering your blood pressure, you can help take this extra demand off your heart and blood vessels.

Blood pressure measurements for normal blood pressure, prehypertension, and hypertension are:

normal:	119 / 79 or lower
prehypertension:	120-139 / 80-89
hypertension:	>139 / 89 >129 / 79 if you have diabetes or kidney disease

What are the most commonly prescribed hypertension medications and how do they work?

- **Hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ)** or **diltiazem** are examples of diuretics. Diuretics work in the kidneys by helping your body get rid of excess water and sodium through urine. Having extra fluid can contribute to high blood pressure.
- **Lisinopril** is an example of an ACE inhibitor. ACE inhibitors work by causing the blood vessels to relax and widen. This increases the supply of blood and oxygen to the organs (heart, kidneys and brain) and helps the heart beat more easily. This medication may be especially helpful for people that already have diabetes, kidney problems, heart disease, heart failure, have had a stroke or have other conditions that affect blood vessels.

- **Prinzide** is a combination of HCTZ (a diuretic) and **lisinopril** (an ACE inhibitor). This medication gives a person the benefit of both of the medications described above. Because most people with high blood pressure need to take two or more medications to control their blood pressure, this medication is a convenient and economical way to get two effective blood pressure medications, which work well together, in one pill. If you take a diuretic and an ACE inhibitor, ask your doctor if you can switch to Prinzide.
- **Atenolol** is an example of a beta blocker. Beta blockers reduce the workload of the heart by relaxing the heart muscle and slowing down the heart rate. This allows your heart to pump blood more easily.
- **Felodipine** or **nifedipine** are examples of a calcium channel blocker. This medication works by relaxing the muscles around your arteries. Relaxing the muscles around your arteries makes it easier for your heart to pump blood.

Do I have to take medication for high blood pressure for the rest of my life?

Most people who take blood pressure medication need to take it for the rest of their lives. Taking blood pressure medication lowers blood pressure and decreases the chances of having a heart attack, stroke, or heart disease. Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the United States.

Whenever you take a medication, consider the benefits, such as controlled blood pressure and a decreased risk of having a heart attack or stroke, compared with the small chance of experiencing a side effect. Talking with your doctor about any side effect you experience can help you and your doctor choose the medicine and dose that best suits your needs.

How do lifestyle changes work with medications?

Making changes in your lifestyle helps your medications work more effectively to lower your blood pressure. Losing weight, exercising, quitting smoking, eating foods lower in sodium, and eliminating alcohol have been shown to be effective in decreasing blood pressure. If you are overweight, focusing on losing 5–10% of your body weight may be the most effective way to lower your blood pressure naturally. Because making healthy choices can lower your blood pressure, focusing on them is important while you are taking your blood pressure medication.

What should I do if I have side effects?

Be sure to tell your doctor if there are reasons why you cannot take any medication that's prescribed. Also, tell your doctor if you seem to have trouble remembering to take your medication.

How can I remember to take my medications?

Everyone has struggled with remembering to do things that they don't regularly do. There are a number of things that can help you remember.

- Use a pillbox that has seven sections, representing the days of the week.
- Establish a daily routine for taking your medications, such as at bedtime, mealtime, or while at the beginning of a daily TV show.
- Make a simple chart and post it in an obvious place where you will see it every day, like on the mirror in the bathroom.
- Set an alarm clock or watch for a reminder.
- Record your medications on a wallet card or calendar.
- Can you think of others?

Are there any special instructions I need to be aware of?

- Keep a personal medication record card (wallet card) with you and keep it up to date. Write down the medications you are taking, any drug or food allergies that you may have, and any non-prescription medications, herbs, or supplements that you are taking.
- Review your medication record card regularly with your doctor or other medical professional, including your dentist.
- When you purchase any new medications, including over-the-counter medications, ask the pharmacist to check for any potential drug interactions with your current medications.
- Refill your medications at least one to two week(s) before you run out.
- If a doctor or other health care professional recommends it, carry some kind of medical identification like a Medic Alert bracelet. For more information, call 1-888-633-4298, or go to www.MedicAlert.org.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.