

Beta Blocker Therapy: Preventing Heart Attacks and Strokes



If you are at risk for developing heart disease—or even if you have already had a heart attack—taking a beta blocker every day can help keep you healthy. People who take beta blockers daily are much less likely to have a heart attack or die from a heart attack or stroke.

How do beta blockers help with heart disease?

Most people think beta blockers are just for lowering blood pressure, but they are also a very helpful medicine for your heart and blood vessels.

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. Beta blockers are used to treat high blood pressure, heart failure, irregular heart beats, blocked arteries, and angina (chest pain). This medication reduces sudden

death (without symptoms or warning) from heart attack in people with coronary heart disease. While taking a beta blocker by itself is not enough to prevent heart attacks and strokes, it is an important part of your medical treatment.

It is common to take other medications in addition to beta blockers to help protect against a heart attack or stroke. Ask your health care professional for more information about other medications that may help you.

What problems could I have taking a beta blocker?

Most people who take this medication have few or no side effects. Some people develop a very slow heart rate or low blood pressure, which can make you feel lightheaded.

People with well controlled asthma can usually take a beta blocker without any problem. In rare cases, the asthma can worsen. If you have uncontrolled asthma, you should not take beta blockers because they may make your asthma worse.

People with diabetes can usually take beta blockers without any problem, although they may reduce the ability to feel the symptoms of a very low blood sugar level (hypoglycemia).

To reduce the risk of having problems taking a beta blocker:

- Talk with your health care professional if you have asthma, heart rhythm problems, depression, or are taking other medications to treat high blood

pressure or chest pain. Medications that you use for these conditions may interact with beta blockers.

- If you have severe allergic reactions (such as anaphylactic shock), you may notice a stronger reaction to allergens while taking this medication. You may need more than the usual amount of an epinephrine injection to treat a severe allergic reaction while taking a beta blocker.
- Do not take a beta blocker if you have had an allergic reaction to any type of beta blocker
- If you are pregnant or may become pregnant in the near future, consult your doctor about taking a beta blocker.
- Tell your doctor or other health care professional if you are taking any of these medications: Diltiazem (Cardizem, Dilacor) or Verapamil (Calan, Isoptin).

Can taking a beta blocker increase my chances of feeling tired?

Possibly, but your health care team will monitor you to make sure that you have no problems while taking this medication.

Beta-adrenergic receptor blocking agents, more commonly known as beta blockers, are a group of medications which include:

- Atenolol (Tenormin)
- Metoprolol (Lopressor, Toprol)
- Propranolol (Inderal)

Will it make my asthma worse?

If you have poorly controlled asthma, you should avoid taking certain types of beta blockers. Discuss the benefits and risks of taking this medication with your health care professional.

Will I have trouble having sex?

Taking your beta blocker at night may help you to manage this possible side effect. Talk to your health care professional if you are concerned.

How do medications (in general) fit into my treatment plan?

Although medications are an important part of your treatment plan, they do not take the place of healthy eating, regular physical activity, and stress management. If you are prescribed medications by your health care professional, it's important for you to take them as directed. Don't stop taking them without consulting with your health care professional first. If you are experiencing side effects, your health care professional may be able to change the medication or the dosage to prevent the side effects. It's likely that you may need to take this medication for the rest of your life, so work with your health care professional to ensure that you are taking the right medicine and dose for you.

What do I need to know about my medications?

Take the time to ask your doctor or health care professional about your medications:

- Why am I taking them?
- How often and how long should I take them?
- Are there any special instructions for taking a particular medication?
- Should I take any medication only at mealtime?
- Are there activities that I should avoid while taking any medication?
- What kind of side effects could I have and what symptoms should I look for?
- Is there a way to avoid any side effects?

What should I do if I have side effects?

Be sure to tell your health care professional if there are reasons why you cannot take any medication that's prescribed. Also, tell your health care professional 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.

- 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.
- Establish a daily routine for taking your medications every day, such as at bedtime, a specific mealtime, or at the beginning of a daily TV show like the evening news.
- Use a pillbox that has seven sections, representing the days of the week.

- Record your medications on a wallet card or calendar.
- Can you think of others? _____

What else could I do to manage my medication?

- Keep a personal medication record card (wallet card) with you and keep it up-to-date. Include any drug or food allergies that you may have and any over-the-counter or non-prescription medications, herbal products, vitamins or supplements that you are taking.
- Review your medication record card regularly with your health care professional, including your dentist.
- When you purchase any new medications, including over-the-counter medications or herbal medications, ask the pharmacist to check for any interactions with your current medications.
- Refill your medications at least one to two week(s) before you run out.
- If a 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 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.