

ACE Inhibitor 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 an ACE Inhibitor every day can help keep you healthy. People who take ACE Inhibitors daily are much less likely of having a heart attack or dying from a heart attack or stroke.

How do ACE Inhibitors help with heart disease?

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

ACE Inhibitors lower blood pressure by causing the blood vessels to relax and widen. This increases the supply of blood and oxygen to the heart and helps the heart beat more easily.

They are also used to treat and prevent kidney problems. While taking an ACE Inhibitor 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 ACE Inhibitors 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 an ACE Inhibitor?

Most people who take this medication have few or no side effects. Some people get a mild cough or tickle in the back of the throat. The cough is usually not very bothersome and it is not always necessary to stop the ACE Inhibitor medication.

Very rarely, some people who take ACE Inhibitors have swelling of the face, eyes, lips, tongue, or throat. Some have difficulty breathing, but this happens in very few people who use ACE Inhibitors. If you experience unusual swelling, call your health care professional. If you experience difficulty breathing, call 911 or go to the emergency department immediately.

Some people who take ACE Inhibitors can develop a high potassium level. Since there are usually no symptoms for high potassium, your health care professional may ask you to have a blood test so it can be monitored.

To reduce the risk of having problems taking an ACE Inhibitor:

- Avoid taking an ACE Inhibitor if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Tell your doctor or health care professional if you have kidney problems, are using diuretics (water pills), are taking potassium supplements, or using salt substitutes.

Can taking an ACE Inhibitor increase my chances of having kidney problems?

Most people who take ACE Inhibitors do not develop kidney problems. Your doctor may ask you to have a blood test to monitor your kidney function.

ACE (Angiotensin Converting Enzyme) Inhibitors are a group of medications which include:

- Lisinopril (Prinivil, Zestril)
- Captopril (Capoten)

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. If you feel you cannot afford your medication, financial assistance may be available. To learn more, talk to the pharmacist or call the Medical Financial Assistance Program (MFAP) at 1-866-399-7696.

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, mealtime, or while at the beginning of a daily TV show such as 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, herbs, 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, 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. Refills may be processed by phone, online through our Web site, or in person at the pharmacy. Refills may be delivered to your home by mail at no extra cost.
- 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**.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at **members.kp.org**.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

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.

If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or serious impairment or dysfunction of your bodily functions or organs; or, (2) when you are in active labor and there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to your or your unborn child's health and safety.