



# BETA BLOCKER THERAPY

## PREVENTING HEART ATTACKS AND STROKES

If you are at risk for developing heart disease—or if you have already had a heart attack or stroke—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 to 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 also are very helpful for your heart and blood vessels.

Beta blockers relax the heart muscle and slow down the heart rate. This makes it easier for your heart to pump blood. Beta blockers are used to treat high blood pressure, heart failure, irregular heart beat, blocked arteries, and angina (chest pain). For people with coronary artery disease, they reduce sudden death, without symptoms or warning, from heart attack. While taking a beta blocker by itself won't prevent heart attacks and strokes, it is an important part of your medical treatment.

People often take other medications along with beta blockers. Ask your health care professional 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 problems. In rare cases, the asthma can get worse. 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 make it harder for you to feel the symptoms of very low blood sugar (hypoglycemia).

### To reduce the risk of having problems while 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 react more severely to allergens while taking a beta blocker. You may need a stronger epinephrine injection to treat a severe allergic reaction.
- Do not take a beta blocker if you have had an allergic reaction to any type of beta blocker in the past.

- If you are pregnant or may become pregnant in the near future, talk with 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*).

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

- atenolol (*Tenormin*)
- metoprolol (*Lopressor, Toprol*)
- propranolol (*Inderal*)

### 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.

### 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 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 your doctor prescribes

# Understanding your medications

medications, be sure to take them as directed. Don't stop taking them without talking it over with your health care professional first. If you have side effects, your health care professional may be able to change the medication or the dosage to prevent them.

It's likely that you will need to take this medication for the rest of your life. Work with your health care professional to make sure that you are taking the right medicine and dose.

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

## What do I need to know about my medications?

Before you leave the clinic, take the time to ask your doctor or a member of your health care team about your medications. Ask:

- Why am I taking them?
- How often and how long should I take them?
- Are there any special instructions for taking this medication?
- Should I always take medications at mealtime?
- Are there activities that I should avoid while taking any medication?
- What kind of side effects could I have? What symptoms should I look for?
- How can I avoid 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 medications.

## How can I remember to take my medications?

We all have a hard time adjusting to new routines in our lives. These tips work for others; maybe they can help you too.

- Make a simple chart and post it in an obvious place where you will see it every day, like the bathroom mirror.
- Set your alarm clock, watch, or computer as a reminder.
- Take medications at the same time every day: before bed, at mealtime, or at the beginning of a TV show you watch every day, such as the evening news.
- Use a pillbox with seven sections, one for each day of the week.
- Record your medication on a wallet card or calendar.
- Can you think of others?

## What else can I do to manage my medication?

- Keep an up-to-date personal medication record card (wallet card) with you. 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 buy any new medications, including over-the-counter drugs or herbal products, ask the pharmacist to check for any interactions with your current medications.
- Refill your medications at least one to two weeks before you run out. Refills may be processed by phone, online through our Website, 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 1-888-663-4298 or go to [MedicAlert.org](http://MedicAlert.org).

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org).
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or 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.