



HYPERTENSION MEDICATIONS

If you have high blood pressure (also called hypertension), you may need to take medicines that your doctor prescribes to help lower your blood pressure. People with hypertension who take blood pressure medicines every day are much less likely to have a heart attack or stroke. You will get the most from your medicines when you take them as prescribed. You can also help your medicines work better by making healthy choices. Taking steps to control your weight and to be physically active can lower your blood pressure. It also helps to eat foods lower in salt (sodium), and to limit alcohol. If you smoke, it is also very important to take steps to quit.

What is hypertension?

Hypertension means having higher than normal blood pressure. Blood pressure is the force of your blood on the walls of your blood vessels. This force, or pressure, enables blood to pump throughout your body. Everyone needs a certain amount of pressure to make this process possible. When the force of blood against your artery walls is too strong you have high blood pressure or hypertension.

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

The top number (**119/79**) of your blood pressure measurement is the systolic pressure. This is the force of blood against your arteries when your heart is sending blood to your body. The lower number (**119/79**) is the diastolic pressure. This is the force of blood against your arteries while your heart relaxes between beats. Both numbers are important. Here are the ranges for different levels of blood pressure:

normal:	119 / 79 or lower
pre-hypertension:	120-139 / 80-89
hypertension:	140 / 90 or higher

Who needs to take blood pressure medications?

It is best to have blood pressure in the “normal” range. Your doctor will probably suggest medications if your blood pressure is in the “hypertension” range, over 140/90. In some cases, for example if you have diabetes, you may also need to take medication if your blood pressure is above 130/80 or in the “pre-hypertension” range.

What are the most commonly used hypertension medicines and how do they work?

- **Hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ)** or **chlorthalidone** are examples of diuretics. Diuretics work in the kidneys by helping your body get rid

of extra water and sodium through urine. Having extra fluid can contribute to high blood pressure.

- **Lisinopril** 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, brain and kidneys) and helps the heart beat more easily. This medicine can be especially helpful for people who have other conditions that affect blood vessels (such as diabetes, kidney problems, heart disease, heart failure, or for people who have had a stroke).
- **Prinzide** is a combination of HCTZ (a diuretic) and lisinopril (an ACE inhibitor). This medication gives a person the benefit of both of these medicines. Because most people with high blood pressure need to take two or more medicines to control their blood pressure, this drug is a convenient and inexpensive way to get two good blood pressure medications 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 relax the heart muscle and slow down the heart rate. This lessens the work of the heart and allows it to pump blood more easily.
- **Amlodipine** is an example of a calcium channel blocker. This medicine relaxes the muscles around your arteries. Relaxing the muscles around your arteries makes it easier for your heart to pump blood.



Will I need to take medicine for high blood pressure for the rest of my life?

Most people who take blood pressure medicines do need to take them for the rest of their lives. Taking these drugs lowers blood pressure and lessens the chances of having a heart attack or stroke or of developing heart disease. Given this, you must weigh the small risk of having side effects against the chances of having a heart attack or stroke. Talk with your doctor about any side effects you have. This can help you and your doctor choose the medicine and dose that works best for you.

How do lifestyle changes work with medications?

Making healthy changes can help your medicines work even better to lower your blood pressure. If you are overweight, focusing on losing 5 to 10 percent of your body weight may be the most effective way to lower your blood pressure naturally. Because making healthy choices can help lower your blood pressure and reduce your risk of heart disease, focusing on them is important while you are taking your blood pressure medication. Here are the most important changes to make:

- Losing weight
- Regular physical activity
- Staying smoke-free or quitting if you smoke
- Eating foods lower in salt
- Limiting or cutting out alcohol

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 sometimes has trouble remembering to do things that they don't do regularly. Here are some tips to help you remember:

- Use a pillbox that has 7 sections, one for each day of the week.
- Establish a daily routine for taking your medications, such as at bedtime, mealtime, or at the beginning of a daily TV show.
- Make a simple chart. Post it in a 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. Also list any drug or food allergies that you may have, and any over-the-counter (nonprescription) 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 buy any medicines, including over-the-counter medications, ask the pharmacist to check for possible drug interactions with your current medications.
- Refill your medications at least 1 to 2 week(s) before you run out.
- If a doctor or other health 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 kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.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 additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.