

# Common Heart Medications

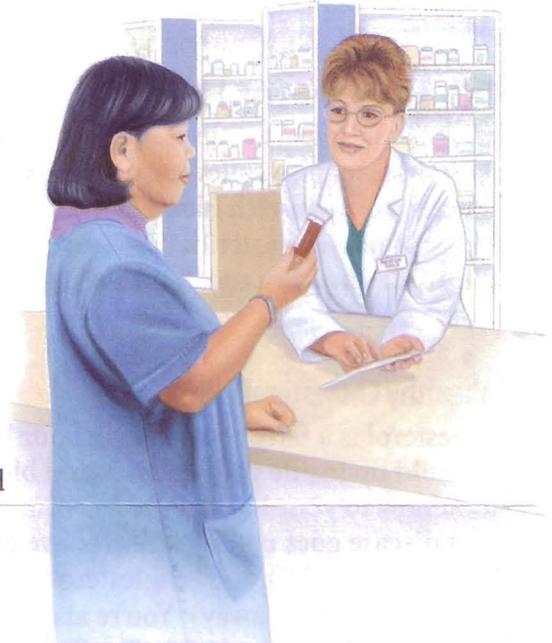
There are hundreds of different medications that can help treat heart disease. Keep a list of all your medications, dosage, and time you need to take them. Add any new medication or changes to your dosage as they're made. Share this list with any new healthcare provider that you visit. Remember to follow up with a visit to your doctor every six months.

## Know Your Medications

Learn what type of medication you're taking, what it treats, and how to take it safely. If you have questions about why you need a medication or how it works, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Medications are prescribed in just the right doses for your heart condition. They work only if you take them exactly as directed. While your doctor can prescribe the best medications for you, it's up to you to take them correctly.

## Common Types of Medication

- **ACE inhibitors** treat high blood pressure and heart failure.
- **Antiarrhythmics** help slow and regulate a fast or irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia).
- **Anticoagulants** help reduce the risk that a blood clot will form and block the artery (thrombosis).
- **Antihypertensives** help treat high blood pressure (hypertension).
- **Aspirin** (taken regularly in the right dosage) helps reduce blood clots.
- **Beta blockers and calcium channel blockers** help treat high blood pressure. They may also help prevent chest pain (angina) and regulate an arrhythmia.
- **Calcium Channel Blockers** help relax the blood vessels and increase oxygen rich blood flow to the heart, reducing blood pressure, controlling heart rate, and preventing angina.
- **Digitalis** helps treat heart failure and may help an irregular heartbeat.
- **Diuretics** help treat high blood pressure and heart failure. They are sometimes called water pills because they help your body get rid of excess water.
- **Lipid-lowering medications** help control your cholesterol and triglyceride levels.
- **Nitrates** help prevent and treat angina.
- **Vasodilators** help blood flow more easily through the arteries. Calcium channel blockers and nitrates are vasodilators.



Take heart medications at the same time every day. This will keep the amount of medication in your bloodstream at a steady level.

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## Risk Factors for Heart Disease

A risk factor for heart disease is something that increases your chance of having heart disease. Heart disease (also called coronary artery disease) involves damage to arteries, blood vessels that carry oxygen-rich blood through your body. Things like smoking or unhealthy cholesterol levels can damage arteries. You can't control some risk factors, such as age and a family history of heart disease. But most, including those listed below, are things you can control.

### Unhealthy Cholesterol Levels

Cholesterol is a fatty substance in your blood. It can build up inside your arteries and block the blood flow to your heart or brain. Your risk of heart disease goes up if you don't have enough HDL cholesterol ("good" cholesterol that clears the bad cholesterol away). You're also at risk if you have high levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol or triglycerides (another substance that can build up).

### Smoking

This is the most important risk factor you can change. Smoking damages your arteries. It reduces blood flow to your heart and brain. It greatly increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, lung disease, and cancer. If you keep smoking after a heart attack, you can double your risk of a second heart attack.

### High blood pressure

High blood pressure occurs when blood pushes too hard against artery walls as it passes through the arteries. This damages the artery lining. High blood pressure raises your risk of heart attack and especially stroke.

### Negative Emotions

Stress, pent-up anger, and other negative emotions have been linked to heart disease. Over time, these emotions could raise your heart disease risk.

### Metabolic Syndrome

This is caused by a combination of certain risk factors. It puts you at extra high risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. You have metabolic syndrome if you have three or more of the following: low HDL cholesterol; high triglycerides; high blood pressure; high blood sugar; extra weight around the waist.

### Diabetes

Diabetes occurs when you have high levels of sugar (glucose) in your blood. This can damage arteries if not kept under control. Having diabetes also makes you more likely to have a silent heart attack—one without any symptoms.

### Excess Weight

Excess weight makes other risk factors, such as diabetes, more likely. Excess weight around the waist or stomach increases your heart disease risk the most.

### Lack of Physical Activity

When you're not active, you're more likely to develop diabetes, high blood pressure, abnormal cholesterol levels, and excess weight.

Most people with heart disease have more than one risk factor.