

# Medication



Medication

Learn more about heart failure at  
[heartandstroke.ca/heartfailure](https://heartandstroke.ca/heartfailure)

# ACE Inhibitors

## Most common ACE Inhibitors

Ask your health care provider to check off the one you are taking.

- Ramipril (Altace)
- Perindopril (Coversyl)
- Trandolapril (Mavik)
- Enalapril (Vasotec)
- Lisinopril (Prinivil, Zestril)
- Quinapril (Accupril)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## What are ACE Inhibitors?

ACE Inhibitors are a group of medications that keep your body from making stress hormones. Stress hormones constrict or narrow blood vessels making it harder for your heart to pump blood around your body.

ACE Inhibitors cause blood vessels to relax, allowing your blood to flow more easily. This reduces the work of your heart and lowers your blood pressure.

## What are ACE Inhibitors used for?

### ACE Inhibitors are used to treat:

- Heart failure
- High blood pressure

### ACE Inhibitors also help:

- Prevent kidney damage in people with diabetes or at risk for kidney disease
- The heart recover after a heart attack

## How do ACE Inhibitors help with heart failure?

### ACE Inhibitors may:

- Slow the progress of your heart failure
- Help you live longer
- Improve your quality of life
- Prevent you from needing to be in the hospital for HF treatment

When used as a part of your heart failure treatment plan along with your other heart failure medications, ACE Inhibitors might help:

- Lessen your shortness of breath
- Reduce the swelling in your legs and belly
- Increase your energy

## What if you miss taking a dose?




If it is almost time for your next dose, skip taking the dose you missed and just take your next scheduled dose.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you have questions about taking your medications, or missed doses, contact your pharmacist or your health care provider.

## Do not take any of the following without checking with your health care provider:

- Alcohol
- Cough or cold medicines
- Black licorice
- Chinese medicines
- Herbal medicines
- Anti-inflammatory medicines (such as Advil, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Naproxen, Aleve, Celebrex)

Common Side Effects	What to do
Dry cough 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This might go away after a while.</li> <li>• If your cough gets worse or becomes a problem for you, contact your health care provider.</li> </ul>
Skin rash Itchiness Fever and chills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact your health care provider if these side effects do not go away within 2 days of starting the medication.</li> </ul>
Dizzy Lightheaded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When changing position such as moving from lying to sitting and sitting to standing, get up slowly.</li> <li>• Contact your health care provider if these side effects continue or get worse.</li> </ul>
Serious but not common side effects	What to do
Swelling of your face, lips, tongue Trouble breathing Difficulty swallowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop taking the ACE Inhibitor.</li> <li>• Contact your doctor right away or go to your nearest emergency department.</li> </ul>

## Medication Tips

- ACE Inhibitors might make you dizzy or lightheaded for the first few days, but this usually improves over time.
  - If your dizziness does not get better, your health care provider might need to change the type or amount of ACE Inhibitor you are taking.
- ACE Inhibitors could increase the potassium level in your body. Do not take potassium supplements unless prescribed by your health-care provider.
  - Check with your health care provider before using products that contain potassium such as salt substitutes.
- If your medication dose is being increased or decreased, your health care provider will want to do a blood test to check your potassium level and kidney function.
- It can take several weeks, and sometimes months, before you notice an improvement in your heart failure.
- If you have low blood pressure, do not do anything that can lower your blood pressure even further:
  - **Do not** drink alcohol.
  - **Do not** do any strenuous exercise.
  - **Do not** take a really hot shower or bath, or use a hot tub or sauna.
- Contact your health care provider if you have diarrhea and/or vomiting that lasts more than two days.
  - This can cause you to lose too much water and could cause problems with your kidneys.

# Angiotensin II Receptor Blockers (ARBs)

## Most common ARBs

Ask your health care provider to check off the one you are taking.

- Candesartan (Atacand)
- Losartan (Cozaar)
- Valsartan (Diovan)
- Irbesartan (Avapro)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## What are ARBs?

ARBs are a group of medications that keep your body from making stress hormones. Stress hormones constrict or narrow blood vessels making it harder for your heart to pump blood around your body.

ARBs cause blood vessels to relax, allowing your blood to flow more easily. This reduces the work of your heart and lowers your blood pressure.

## What are ACE Inhibitors used for?

### Used to treat:

- Heart failure
- High blood pressure

### ARBs also help:

- Prevent kidney damage in people with diabetes or at risk for kidney disease
- The heart recover after a heart attack

## How do ARBs help with heart failure?

### ARBs may:

- Slow the progress of your heart failure
- Help you live longer
- Improve your quality of life
- Prevent you from needing to be in the hospital for HF treatment

When used as a part of your heart failure treatment plan along with your other heart failure medications, ARBs may help:

- Lessen your shortness of breath
- Reduce the swelling in your legs and belly
- Increase your energy

## What if you miss taking a dose?


If it is almost time for your next dose, skip taking the dose you missed and just take your next scheduled dose.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you have questions about taking your medications, or missed doses, contact your pharmacist or your health care provider.

## Do not take any of the following without checking with your health care provider:

- Alcohol
- Cough or cold medicines
- Black licorice
- Chinese medicines
- Herbal medicines
- Anti-inflammatory medicines (such as Advil, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Naproxen, Aleve, Celebrex)

Common Side Effects	What to do
Dizzy Lightheaded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get up slowly when changing position such as moving from lying to sitting or sitting to standing.</li> <li>• Contact your health care provider if these side effects continue or get worse.</li> <li>• This side effect may be the strongest after your first dose especially if you also take a diuretic.</li> </ul>
Lowering of blood pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get up slowly when changing position such as moving from lying to sitting or sitting to standing.</li> <li>• Contact your health care provider if these side effects continue or get worse.</li> </ul>
Diarrhea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact your health care provider if it lasts more than 2 days.</li> </ul>
Serious but not common side effects	What to do
Swelling of your face, lips, tongue Trouble breathing, Difficulty swallowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop taking the ARBs.</li> <li>• Contact your doctor right away or go to your nearest emergency department.</li> </ul>

**Do you know?** That it can sometimes take several weeks or months before your symptoms improve and you start to feel better.

## Medication Tips

- ARBs might make you dizzy or lightheaded for the first few days, but this usually improves over time.
  - If these symptoms do not get better, your health care provider might need to change the amount of the ARB you are taking
- If you have symptoms of low blood pressure, you may want to avoid activities that will lower your blood pressure even further such as:
  - Drinking alcohol
  - Doing strenuous exercise
  - Taking a really hot shower or bath
  - Using a hot tub
- ARBs could increase the potassium level in your body. Do not take potassium supplements unless prescribed by your health-care provider.
  - Check with your health care provider before using products that contain potassium such as salt substitutes
  - Your health care provider will do a blood test to check your potassium level and kidney function from time to time
- Contact your health care provider if you have diarrhea and/or vomiting that lasts more than two days.
  - As it may cause you to lose too much water which could cause problems with your kidneys

# Beta Blockers

## Most common Beta Blockers

Ask your health care provider to check off the one you are taking.

- Bisoprolol (Monacor)
- Carvedilol (Coreg)
- Metoprolol (Lopressor)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## What are Beta Blockers?

Beta Blockers are a group of medications that relax the heart muscle and slow down the heart rate. These medications also block the effects of your body's stress hormones. Stress hormones narrow blood vessels making it harder for your heart to pump blood around your body. Blocking your stress hormones relaxes blood vessels, making it easier for your heart to pump.

## What are Beta Blockers used for?

- Heart failure
- High blood pressure
- Fast heart rate or irregular heart rhythms
- Angina chest pain
- After a heart attack

## How do Beta Blockers help with heart failure?

### Beta Blockers can:

- Lower your blood pressure so your heart doesn't have to work as hard
- Slow the progress of your heart failure
- Improve your quality of life
- Help you live longer

## What if you miss taking a dose?

If it is almost time for your next dose, skip taking the dose you missed and just take your next scheduled dose.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you have questions about taking your medications, or missed doses, contact your pharmacist or your health care provider.

## Do not take any of the following without checking with your health care provider

- Alcohol
- Cough or cold medicines
- Black licorice
- Herbal medicines
- Chinese medicines
- Anti-inflammatory medicines (such as Advil, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Naproxen, Aleve, Celebrex)
- Other medicines you can buy at a pharmacy

Health care provider contact information

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**Did you know?** It can take several weeks, and sometimes months, before you notice your heart failure improving and you start feeling better.

## Common Side Effects

If you get any of these side effects, talk with your health care provider about how best to deal with them. Contact your health care provider **right away** if any of these side effects listed below do not go away or get worse.

- Feeling tired all the time
- Dizzy or lightheaded
- A very slow heart rate (medication slows down your heart too much) – can make you feel dizzy
- Short of breath or trouble breathing
- Cold hands or feet
- Numbness or tingling in your hands or feet



- Changes in mood
- Feeling down or depressed
- Trouble sleeping
- Nightmares
- Loss of sexual desire
- Liquid bowel movements (diarrhea)

**If you are taking diabetes medication, beta blockers can mask or hide signs of a low blood sugar. For example, you might not feel shaky or feel your heart racing. However, you will have other signs of a low blood sugar such as hunger and sweating.**

**Do you know?** People often feel worse for the first 1 to 2 weeks after starting beta blockers or after the dose is changed. You might feel more tired than usual, or notice your heart failure symptoms are worse.

## Medication Tips

Before you start taking a beta blocker, make sure you tell your health care provider:

- If you have a history of breathing problems (such as asthma)
- If you have peripheral vascular disease (such as cold hands or feet, or pain in legs after walking)

If you have high blood pressure, talk with your health care provider before using any products that might raise your blood pressure such as:

- Cough or cold drugs
- Diet pills or other stimulants
- Ibuprofen
- Natural products

**Do not suddenly stop taking beta blockers.** It can make your heart failure worse.

If you have low blood pressure, do not do anything that can lower your blood pressure even further.

- **Do not** drink alcohol.
- **Do not** do any strenuous exercise.
- **Do not** take really hot showers or baths, or use a hot tub.

**Contact your health care provider right away** if you have any of these signs of a very bad reaction to the beta blocker:

- Wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Itching skin
- Seizures
- Swelling of face, lips, tongue, or throat
- If you feel like you are going to faint or collapse



# Mineralocorticoid Receptor Antagonist (MRA)

A group of medications also called aldosterone inhibitors or aldosterone antagonists.

## Most common MRA

Ask your health care provider to check off the one you are taking.

- Spironolactone (Aldactone)
- Eplerenone (Inspra)

## What are MRA?

Class of medication that blocks Aldosterone – a steroid hormone that helps your kidneys control the amount of sodium, potassium, and water in your body. MRA's have two actions. By blocking this hormone:

- Your kidneys hold onto more potassium.
- Your kidneys get rid of more salt (sodium) and water by increasing how much you urinate ('pee').

## What are MRA used for?

- Heart failure
- High blood pressure
- Other health problems that cause fluid to build-up in the body

## How do MRA help with heart failure?

- Less water in your body lowers your blood pressure so your heart doesn't have to work as hard
- Decreases your shortness of breath
- Decreases swelling in your legs and bloating in your stomach
- Could prevent you from needing treatment for heart failure in the hospital

## What if you miss taking a dose?

If it is almost time for your next dose, skip taking the dose you missed and just take your next scheduled dose.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you have questions about taking your medications, or missed doses, contact your pharmacist or your health care provider.

## Do not take any of the following without checking with your health care provider:

- Potassium supplements
- Salt substitutes
- Alcohol
- Cough or cold medicines
- Black licorice
- Herbal medicines
- Chinese medicines
- Anti-inflammatory medicines (such as Advil, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Naproxen, Aleve, Celebrex)
- Other medicines you can buy at a pharmacy without a prescription

Health care provider contact information

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## Common Side Effects

Always tell your health care provider if you have any side effects.

- High levels of potassium in your blood
- Urinating or going pee too often
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Dehydration (when you have lost too much fluid)



### You may be dehydrated if you:

- Lose more than 4 lbs in 2 days or 5 lbs in a week.
- Have a really dry mouth.
- Are very thirsty.
- Are extremely dizzy.
- Your urine (pee) is a really dark-colour.

- Feeling sick to your stomach (nauseated)
- Not having an appetite
- Headache
- Muscle cramps
- For men:



- Breast tenderness
- Enlarged breasts

### Less common side effects

- Rash
- Menstrual irregularities and breast tenderness in women

Contact your health care provider right away if side effects do not go away or get worse.

## Medication Tips

- While taking an aldosterone blocker, weigh yourself every day and record your weight.
  - Call your health care provider if you gain more than 4 lbs (2 kg) in 2 days in a row or 5 lbs (2.5 kg) in 1 week.
- Do not drink more than 1½ to 2 litres of fluid each day.  
1½ - 2.0 litres = 48 - 64 ounces = 6 - 8 glasses  
(Refer to Limiting Fluid resource on our website to learn more visit [heartandstroke.ca/heart/conditions/heart-failure](http://heartandstroke.ca/heart/conditions/heart-failure))
- To keep from feeling sick to your stomach, eat food right before or after taking the medication.
- Do not take potassium supplements or eat foods high in potassium such as dried fruit, potatoes, orange juice, bananas, and avocados.  
Refer to Foods High in Potassium resource on our website visit [heartandstroke.ca/heart/conditions/heart-failure](http://heartandstroke.ca/heart/conditions/heart-failure)
- Your health care provider might arrange for regular blood tests to check your potassium and sodium levels, and kidney function.
- Always check with your health care provider before you stop taking your aldosterone blocker. If you stop taking this medication, your heart failure could get worse.
- Always tell your health care provider if you are taking high blood pressure medications, digoxin, anti inflammatory medication, or steroids such as cortisone.
- Always tell your health care provider if you have diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease, or gout.
- If you have low blood pressure, do not do anything that can lower your blood pressure even more.
  - **Do not** drink alcohol.
  - **Do not** take really hot showers or baths, use a hot tub or sauna.

# Diuretics

## Most common Diuretics

Ask your health care provider to check off the one you are taking.

- Furosemide (Lasix)
- Metolazone (Zaroxolyn)
- Hydrochlorothiazide (HydroDIURIL, Moduret)
- Bumetanide (Burinex)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## What are Diuretics?

Diuretics are medications that help your kidneys get rid of any extra water and extra salt in your body. Many people call these medications 'water-pills'.

## What are Diuretics used for?

- Heart failure
- High blood pressure
- Other health problems that cause fluid to build-up in the body

## How do Diuretics help with my heart failure?

### Diuretics can:

- Lower your blood pressure so your heart doesn't have to work as hard
- Prevent or reduce shortness of breath, swelling and bloating
- Help you urinate ('go pee') more so your body has less fluid and your heart doesn't have to work as hard to pump
- Improve your quality of life

## What if you miss taking a dose?

If it is almost time for your next dose, skip taking the dose you missed and just take your next scheduled dose.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you have questions about taking your medications, or missed doses, contact your pharmacist, or your health care provider.

## Do not take any of the following without checking with your health care provider:

- Alcohol
- Cough or cold medicines
- Black licorice
- Herbal medicines
- Chinese medicines
- Anti-inflammatory medicines (such as Advil, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Naproxen, Aleve, Celebrex)
- Other medicines you can buy at a pharmacy

Health care provider contact information

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## Common Side Effects

**Always tell your health care provider if you have any side effects.**

- Urinating or going pee often
  - This can last up to 4 hours after you take your diuretic.
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Loss of potassium and sodium (salt) which could cause:
  - irregular heartbeat
  - muscle cramps
  - blurred vision
  - confusion
  - headache



- Feeling sick to your stomach (nauseated) or not having an appetite
- Feeling very tired or weak
- Skin rash
- Dehydration (when you have lost too much fluid).



You are dehydrated if you notice you have a really dry mouth, you are very thirsty, your urine (pee) is dark-coloured, or you are extremely dizzy.

**Contact your health care provider right away these side effects do not go away or get worse.**

## Medication Tips

- While taking a diuretic, weigh yourself every day and record your weight. Call your health care provider if you gain more than 4 lbs (2 kg) in 2 days or 5 lbs (2.5 kg) in 1 week.
- Always check with your health care provider before you stop taking your diuretic. If you stop taking your diuretic, your heart failure could get worse.
- Drink no more than 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid each day.  
1.5-2.0 litres = 48-64 ounces = 6-8 glasses  
(Refer to Limiting Fluid resource to learn more)
- If you get an upset stomach from taking your diuretic, take your pills with meals.
- Get up slowly when changing position such as moving from lying to sitting and sitting to standing.
- Balance rest with activity to conserve your energy.
- Take your last dose before 5:00 p.m. so you don't have to get up often during the night.
- Limit the amount of time you spend in the sun and always wear sun screen (even on cloudy days).
- Always tell your health care provider if you are taking high blood pressure medications, digoxin, anti-inflammatory medication, or steroids.
- Always tell your health care provider if you have diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease, or gout.
- Check your blood pressure at least once a week or have it checked by your health care provider.
- Make sure your blood is tested regularly to check the levels of potassium and sodium, and to check your kidney function.
- If you have low blood pressure, do not do anything that can lower your blood pressure even more.
  - **Do not** drink alcohol.
  - **Do not** do any heavy exercise.
  - **Do not** take really hot showers or baths, or use a hot tub or sauna.

# The Combination of Hydralazine and a Nitrate

## Why take both hydralazine and a nitrate?

The combination of hydralazine and a nitrate are used to treat heart failure if you are not able to take either an Angiotensin Converting Enzyme Inhibitor (ACE) or Angiotensin II Receptor Blocker (ARB).

Also, people from African descent benefit from the combination of hydralazine and nitrate in addition to standard heart failure medications.

## What is hydralazine?

It is a medication that relaxes your arteries. This lowers your blood pressure, allowing blood and oxygen to flow more easily through your body.

Hydralazine is the most common name but it could also be called Apresoline.

## What are nitrates?

These are a group of medications that relax your veins, easing the work on your heart.

## Most common nitrates

Ask your health care provider to check off the one you are taking.

- Isosorbide dinitrate (pill) (Isordil)
- Isosorbide-5-mononitrate (pill) (Imdur)
- Nitroglycerin (patch) (Minitran, Nitro-Dur, Transderm-Nitro, Trinipatch)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## How will this combination help with your heart failure?

### Together, these medications can:

- lower your blood pressure
- reduce the work of your heart
- improve your quality of life
- help you live longer
- help you stay out of the hospital

## What if you miss taking a dose?

If it is almost time for your next dose, skip taking the dose you missed. Just take your next scheduled dose.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you have questions about taking your medications, or missed doses, contact your pharmacist, or your health care provider.

## Do not take any of the following without checking with your health care provider:

- Alcohol
- Cough or cold medicines
- Black licorice
- Herbal or Chinese medicines
- Anti-inflammatory medicines (such as Advil, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Naproxen, Aleve, Celebrex)
- Other medicines you buy at a pharmacy without a prescription

Health care provider contact information

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## Common Side Effects

### Hydralazine

- low blood pressure with feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- feeling weak
- constipation
- loose bowel movements or diarrhea
- headache
- flushing (warmth or redness in your face, neck, or chest)



### Nitrate

- headache
- very low blood pressure
- dizzy or lightheaded
- flushing of the face and neck
- skin irritation with patch adhesive (consider the tablet instead)

Talk to your health care provider if you have any of these **common side effects**, if they worry you.

## Serious Side Effects

### Hydralazine

- fainting
- fast or pounding heart
- numbness, tingling, or burning pain in your hands or feet
- rash
- swollen joints
- unexplained fever



### Nitrate

- blurred vision
- chest pain
- fainting
- hives
- difficulty breathing or swallowing
- an upset stomach (nausea)
- throwing up (vomiting)

Contact your health care provider right away if you have any of these **serious side effects**.

## Medication Tips

While taking the combination of hydralazine and nitrate, get your blood pressure checked regularly.

### When taking nitrate by patch:

- Always remove the patch for at least 12 hours in a row within a 24 hour period. This prevents your body from getting used to the medication.
- Always change where you put the patch on your body. This helps prevent skin problems.

### When taking nitrate by pill:

- Always wait at least 12 hours between taking your last dose one day and your first dose the next day. This prevents your body from getting used to the medication.

- If you have low blood pressure, do not do anything that can lower your blood pressure even further.
  - **Do not** drink alcohol.
  - **Do not** exercise outside of your limits.
  - **Do not** take really hot showers or baths
  - **Do not** use a hot tub.
- These medications can cause dizziness. Do not drive a car or operate heavy duty machinery until you know how these medications affect you.
- While taking a nitrate, **do not** take erectile dysfunction medication (such as Viagra, Cialis, Levitra). It could result in a serious drop in your blood pressure and make you faint.
- **Do not** suddenly stop taking the combination of hydralazine and nitrate. It could make your heart failure worse.

# Warfarin (Coumadin)

## What is Warfarin?

Warfarin is a medication that stops blood clots in your body from forming or getting bigger.

Warfarin is sometimes called a 'blood thinner'. It does not actually thin your blood. It just makes you bleed more easily.

## Why are you taking Warfarin?

People take warfarin for different reasons. Ask your health care provider to check off the reason why you are taking it.

- Atrial fibrillation
- Heart valve
- You have had a clot
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## How does Warfarin help?

If you have a health problem that increases the chances of you getting a blood clot, warfarin prevents clots from forming.

If you already have a blood clot, warfarin prevents the clot from getting any bigger.

## Why do you have to get blood tests all the time?

You must have your blood tested regularly while taking warfarin. You must have blood tests often at first. This test helps your health care provider adjust the dose to the right amount for you.

The blood test to check your blood clotting is called International Normalized Ratio (INR).

It is not always easy to keep your INR at the right level because many things affect your blood's clotting.

When the INR is:	Your health care provider will tell you how much to:
Too Low	Increase the dose of warfarin
Too High	Decrease the dose of warfarin

## What if you miss taking a dose?

Always let your health care provider know if you miss a dose. Missing a dose can affect your INR results. Not knowing you missed a dose, your health care provider could change your dose more or less than it should be changed.

If it is almost time for your next dose, skip taking the dose you missed. Take your next dose at the scheduled time.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you have questions about taking your medications or missed doses, contact your pharmacist or health care provider.

## Do not take any of the following without checking with your health care provider:

- Any new medication
- Alcohol
- Cough or cold medicines
- Black licorice
- Herbal medicines
- Chinese medicines
- Other medicines you can buy at a pharmacy



## Common Side Effects

Always tell your health care provider if you have any side effects.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bruising easily</li><li>• Small amounts of bleeding from gums when you brush and floss your teeth</li><li>• Getting small nose bleeds</li><li>• Taking a long time to stop bleeding when you have a cut</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Red spots on the skin</li><li>• Feeling tired</li><li>• Feeling slightly lightheaded</li><li>• For women, having heavier than usual menstrual periods</li></ul> |
|---|---|

Contact your health care provider right away if side effects do not go away or get worse. Arrange to see a health care provider as soon as possible if you have a serious fall or injury.

## When to go to Emergency or call 9-1-1

If your INR gets too high, there is a greater chance you could start bleeding and need to get help.

### Signs you are bleeding somewhere:

- Bloody or black stools ('poo')
- Pink, red, or dark brown urine ('pee')
- Coughing up blood
- Throwing up blood or throwing up what looks like coffee grounds
- Bleeding from the gums, nose, or eyes that will not stop
- Bleeding into the whites of the eyes
- Painful, blue, or purple toes
- Swelling of the abdomen or pain in the back that does not go away
- Severe headache

If your INR is too low, there is a greater chance you could get a blood clot and need to get help.

### Signs you have a blood clot somewhere:

- Sudden weakness in one or both of your arms or legs
- Changes in your vision 
- Slurred speech
- Dizziness or fainting
- Pain or swelling in your lower legs 
- Prolonged or severe headache
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath 

Health care provider contact information

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## Medication Tips

- Wear medical alert identification that tells others you are taking warfarin.
- Always check with your health care provider before you stop taking warfarin. If you stop suddenly, you could have a stroke.
- Keep active. Regular activity helps circulate your blood and can help prevent clots from forming.
- Most activities are safe. However, do not take part in any activities where injury is common, such as contact sports.
- Some medicines can increase your INR and increase the chances of bleeding.
  - While taking warfarin, do not take:
    - ibuprofen
    - herbal medicines
    - herbal supplements
    - fish oil (Omega 3 fatty acids)
  - If you take vitamin E, do not take any more than 400 units (IU) a day.
  - Always check with your health care provider before taking any other medicines you can buy from the pharmacy without a doctor's prescription.
- If you become pregnant or wish to get pregnant, you should not be taking warfarin. Talk to your health care provider.

### When you travel:

- You might need to get an INR blood test before you travel and/or while you are away. Check with your health care provider.
- To keep your blood circulating when sitting for long periods, make sure you stretch your legs and move your body each hour.

- To reduce the chances of bleeding:
  - Use a soft toothbrush.
  - Use an electric razor.
- Alcohol can affect how the warfarin works on your blood.
- Always tell your health care provider if you are taking any of these medications:
  - aspirin
  - amiodarone
  - digoxin
  - anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve), or Celebrex
  - antibiotics
  - steroids
  - clopidogrel
- Vitamin K helps your blood clot. While taking warfarin, it is important to keep the amount of vitamin K in your diet the same. If the amount of vitamin K you eat changes from day to day, it can make your INR results go up and down. Remember, if your INR gets too high or too low, the chances of you bleeding or getting a clot increases.

### Foods high in vitamin K:

green leafy vegetables such as broccoli, lettuce, cabbage, Swiss chard, spinach, kale, asparagus, parsley, seaweed, Collards, beet and turnip greens, amaranth leaves, brussel sprouts

If you normally eat any of these foods, eat similar amounts each day.

Learn more about heart failure at  
[heartandstroke.ca/heartfailure](https://heartandstroke.ca/heartfailure)

# Digoxin (Lanoxin or Toloxin)

## What is Digoxin?

Digoxin is a medication that:

- Slows your heart rate down
- Helps the heart beat stronger

This medication might be added to your treatment plan to improve some symptoms of your heart failure.

## What is Digoxin used for?

For people with heart failure, we use digoxin to help the heart beat stronger and pump better.

For people with **irregular heart rhythms** (such as atrial fibrillation), we use digoxin to help the heart beat slower.

## How does Digoxin help with heart failure?

When digoxin strengthens the pumping action of the heart, it should help you:

- Feel less tired
- Feel stronger
- Feel less short of breath
- Have less swelling of the feet and ankles

Digoxin helps control some of the electrical impulses in the heart. This slows the heart beat down and helps it to beat with a more regular rhythm. This adds to the effects of a stronger pumping action.

Digoxin helps keep your heart failure symptoms from getting worse.

## What if you miss taking a dose?

If you remember within 12 hours of when were to take the missed dose, take it as soon as you remember.

If you are due to take your next dose in less than 12 hours, do not take the missed dose. Wait and take your next dose when you normally take it. Continue to take your digoxin as scheduled

If you have questions about taking your medications, or missed doses, contact your pharmacist or your health care provider.

## Do not take any of the following without checking with your health care provider:

- Herbal medicines
- Alcohol
- Cough or cold medicines
- Black licorice
- Chinese medicines
- Anti-inflammatory medicines (such as Advil, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Naproxen, Aleve, Celebrex)
- Other medicines you can buy at a pharmacy

Health care provider contact information

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## Common Side Effects

**Always tell your health care provider if you have any side effects.**

- Feeling weak or tired
- Feeling sick to your stomach (nauseated)
- Throwing up (vomiting)
- Abdominal pain
- Do not feel like eating (lost your appetite)



- Skin rash, itchiness
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Headache
- Changes in your vision:
  - Red, green or yellow color disturbances
  - Things look slightly blurry
  - Sensitive to bright light
  - Seeing flashing lights



**Contact your health care provider right away if any of these side effects do not go away or get worse.**

## Medication Tips

- Take your digoxin at the same time every day.
- Take your digoxin 1 hour before eating or 2 hours after eating.
- If you take an antacid, high fibre foods, or fibre supplements, always wait 2 hours before you can take your digoxin. These things can reduce the amount of digoxin absorbed by your body.
- **Never stop taking digoxin all of a sudden.** It can make your heart failure worse.
- You need your heart rate and blood pressure checked regularly while taking digoxin.
  - If you can check your heart rate and blood pressure at home, ask your health care provider when to call with any changes in your heart rate or blood pressure.
- Digoxin is broken down in your body by your kidneys. Let your health care provider know if you are having any kidney problems or have kidney disease. You might need a blood test to check how well your kidneys are working.
- You might be sent for a blood test to check the level of digoxin in your blood, especially when you first start taking it. This tells your health care provider if the dose needs changing. This blood test is best done 8 or more hours after your last dose.
- **Contact your health care provider right away or go to the nearest Emergency Department** if you have any of these signs of too much digoxin in your body:
  - Your heart is beating very slow (less than 50 beats a minute) and you feel weak or dizzy.
  - You have nausea and vomiting that does not go away.
  - You have diarrhea, maybe even with blood in it or it looks black.
  - You feel very confused, are seeing things that are not there (hallucinating), or have unusual thoughts or behaviour.
  - You have trouble seeing, everything looks green or yellow, everything is blurry, or you see 'halos' around objects.

# Angiotensin Receptor – Neprilysin Inhibitor (ARNI)

## Most common ARNIs

Ask your health care provider to check off the one you are taking.

Sacubitril/Valsartan (Entresto™)

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## What is an Angiotensin Receptor – Neprilysin Inhibitor (ARNI)?

It is a combination of two medications, sacubitril and valsartan.

**Valsartan** is an angiotensin II receptor blocker (ARB). It stops your body from making stress hormones, which constrict or narrow blood vessels. Stress hormones make it harder for the heart to pump blood around the body. By blocking the stress hormone, blood vessels relax, and blood flows more easily. This reduces the work of your heart and lowers your blood pressure.

**Sacubitril** inhibits or blocks an enzyme called neprilysin (a neprilysin inhibitor). When this enzyme is blocked, it allows helpful substances to stay in the body longer. These substances (called natriuretic peptides) help blood vessels relax, allowing your body to get rid of excess fluid. This makes it easier for your heart to pump blood.

## What are ARNIs used for?

ARNIs are used to treat heart failure by lowering the blood pressure and getting rid of excess fluid. Together, these medicines reduce the work of the heart and may improve your ejection fraction.

To learn more about 'ejection fraction', visit our website [heartandstroke.ca/heart/conditions/heart-failure](http://heartandstroke.ca/heart/conditions/heart-failure)

## How does an ARNI help with heart failure?

When used with other heart failure medications, it may:

- Help you live longer
- Improve your heart failure symptoms
- Prevent you from needing to be in the hospital for heart failure treatment
- Slow the worsening of your heart failure

## What if you miss taking a dose?

If it is more than 4 hours until your next dose, take the missed dose then take your usual dose at the usual time.




If it is less than 4 hours until your next dose, just take your next scheduled dose. Do not take the missed dose.

Never take two doses at the same time.

If you have questions about taking your medications, or missed doses, contact your pharmacist or your healthcare provider.

## Do not take any of the following without checking with your healthcare provider:

- Alcohol
- Cough or cold medicines
- Black licorice
- Herbal medicines
- Chinese medicines
- Anti-inflammatory medicines (such as Advil, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Naproxen, Aleve, Celebrex, Indocid)
- Angiotensin Converting Enzyme Inhibitor (ACE-I)
- An additional Angiotensin II Receptor Blocker (ARB)

Common Side Effects	What to do
Lowering of blood pressure	<p>Do not do anything that could lower your blood pressure even further.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Do not</b> drink alcohol.</li> <li>• <b>Do not</b> do any strenuous exercise. (Always check with your healthcare provider first).</li> <li>• <b>Do not</b> take really hot showers or baths.</li> <li>• <b>Do not</b> use a hot tub.</li> </ul>
Dizzy Lightheaded	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get up slowly when changing position, such as moving from lying to sitting or sitting to standing.</li> <li>• Dizziness usually goes away after your body gets used to the medication.</li> </ul>
Decrease in how much you pee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call your healthcare provider if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your pee (urine) is dark coloured <b>and</b></li> <li>• You are not going pee (urinating) as much as you normally do.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Dry cough	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the cough gets worse or becomes a problem for you, contact your healthcare provider.</li> </ul>
Tired or weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balance rest and activity</li> </ul>
Nausea or Stomach upset	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you are currently taking this medication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With food, try taking it without food.</li> <li>• Without food, try taking it with food.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Get rid of strong smells.</li> <li>• Open windows to get fresh air.</li> <li>• Use a fan, air deodorizers, or air fresheners.</li> </ul>
<b>Serious but not common side effects</b>	<b>What to do</b>
Swelling of your face, lips, tongue Trouble breathing, Difficulty swallowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stop taking this medication immediately.</b></li> <li>• Contact your doctor right away or go to your nearest emergency department.</li> </ul>

## Medication Tips

- If your healthcare provider is switching your medication from an ACE-I to an ARNI, **you must wait at least 36 hours after your last dose of the ACE-I before you take your first dose of ARNI.**
- **Do not take an ARNI if you are:**
  - Pregnant or planning to become pregnant (It can cause injury and even death to your unborn baby).
  - Breastfeeding.
  - 18 years or younger.
- If your medication dose is being increased or decreased, your healthcare provider will want to do a blood test to check your potassium level and kidney function.
- Do not suddenly stop taking your ARNI without checking with your healthcare provider first, except if you are having trouble breathing, difficulty swallowing, or have swelling of your face, lips or tongue.
- Take your ARNI exactly as directed by your healthcare provider, even if you feel well.
- ARNIs can increase the potassium level in your body.
  - Do not take potassium supplements unless prescribed by your health-care provider.
  - Check with your healthcare provider before using products that contain potassium such as salt substitutes.
- Certain medications can increase your risk of side effects. Always tell your healthcare provider if you are taking any of these medications:
  - Cholesterol lowering medication (simvastatin, atorvastatin)
  - Water pills (furosemide)
  - Medications used to treat erectile dysfunction (Viagra)
  - Medications used to treat pulmonary hypertension
  - Medications that increase potassium in the blood (spironolactone, eplerenone)
  - Lithium
  - Aliskiren (Rasilez)
  - Cyclosporine
  - Medications to treat HIV or Hepatitis C
  - Medications that may decrease your blood pressure (including nitroglycerine)

Learn more about heart failure at  
[heartandstroke.ca/heartfailure](https://heartandstroke.ca/heartfailure)



# Herbs and Herbal Supplements

Adapted from Cleveland Clinic and Mayo Clinic information on herbs and herbal supplements.

## Herbs and herbal supplements can be harmful to people taking heart medications.

Always tell your health care provider about any herbs or herbal supplements you are taking.

Bring the herbs and herbal supplements you are taking to every medical visit so they can be checked.

## What are herbs and herbal supplements?

Herbs and herbal supplements are plants that are used for medicinal purposes. Some people call them botanicals or herbal remedies.

## Why should you be careful taking these products?

We do not always know what the active ingredients are in many herbs and herbal supplements.

### Herbs and herbal supplements:

- Can act in the same way as medications. This means they can be dangerous to your health if not taken correctly, if taken in large amounts, or if taken in combination with other medications.
- Can interact with heart medications. This could cause the medication to not work as it should, magnify the medication's side effects, or cause a life-threatening reaction.
- Have not been studied to the same extent as other medications.
- They are classified as dietary supplements not medications. Therefore they are not regulated the same way other medications are regulated. The rules for making dietary supplements are not as strict.

## Tips

- Before you cook with herbs contact your health care provider.
- Always talk to your health care provider or pharmacist before taking herbs or herbal supplements. They can review the herbal medicine and tell you whether it could impact your heart medication.
- If you are not sure what is considered an herb or herbal supplement, see the list on the next page.
- Never use herbs or herbal supplements if you are taking one of these medications:
  - Aspirin
  - Digoxin
  - Diuretics
  - Hypoglycemic medications such as insulin
  - Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve), Celebrex
  - Spironolactone
  - Warfarin



## Health care provider contact information:

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If you have questions about herbs or herbal supplements, contact your health care provider or pharmacist.

To learn more about herbal supplements, go online to MedlinePlus. Click on the tab 'Drugs & Supplements' then select 'Herbs and Supplements' visit [medlineplus.gov/druginfo/herb\\_All.html](https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/herb_All.html)

# Herbs and Herbal Supplements

Adapted from Cleveland Clinic and Mayo Clinic information on herbs and herbal supplements.

Herb or herbal supplement name	Reason for taking	Possible problems when you have a heart condition or taking heart medication
Aloe vera (Oral)	For constipation or indigestion. To prevent skin irritation.	Causes abnormal heart rhythms in pregnancy and in children.
Angelica (Dong quai)	Appetite loss, indigestion, infection, pre-menstrual tension syndrome.	Can increase the risk of bleeding, especially when taking warfarin.
Arnica	To reduce aches, or pain from injury. To relieve constipation.	Raise blood pressure and can be toxic to the heart.
Black cohosh (Cimicifuga racemosa)	To relieve symptoms of menopause or pre-menstrual tension syndrome.	Lowers blood pressure. Can increase the risk of bleeding (cause more bleeding). Can be toxic to liver.
Beta carotene	Antioxidant helps get rid of substances that harm the body (free radicals).	Increases the risk of death.
CoQ10 (Co-enzyme Q10, Ubiquinone, Ubiquinol)	To increase your energy. To treat heart failure or other heart conditions.	Does not improve heart function. Can decrease the effect of warfarin.
Danshen (Salvia miltiorrhiza-root)	To treat heart conditions.	Can increase the risk of bleeding (cause more bleeding).
Echinacea	To prevent colds.	Interferes with an enzyme in the liver that helps clear medications out of the body.
Ephedra (Ma Huang)	To treat asthma, obesity.	Increases heart rate and blood pressure. Could cause death if taken with certain heart medications.
Feverfew	To treat/prevent migraines, arthritis.	Can interfere with the clotting of your blood.
Fish oil	A common supplement.	Can increase the risk of bleeding, especially if used in excess.
Flaxseed	To lower cholesterol.	Can increase the risk of bleeding.
Ginger	To relieve nausea, lower cholesterol, stop your blood from clotting, aid in digestion.	Can interfere with the clotting of your blood. Can interfere with how heart or high blood pressure medications work.
Garlic	To lower cholesterol. To prevent and treat colds and infections.	If you are taking aspirin, warfarin or other anticoagulants, it can increase your risk of bleeding.
Ginkgo	To improve circulation, memory. To prevent altitude sickness.	If you are taking aspirin, warfarin or other anticoagulants, it can increase your risk of bleeding. Interferes with the actions of diuretics (Lasix).
Ginseng	To improve memory, physical capacity, immune system and to slow aging.	Increases blood pressure and heart rate. <b>Do not</b> take if you have high blood pressure (hypertension). Can increase blood levels of digoxin. Can increase the risk of bleeding.
Goldenseal	To treat constipation, can also acts as an anti inflammatory.	Increases blood pressure, causes high blood pressure. Can interfere with blood thinners (anticoagulants).
Hawthorn	To treat high blood pressure and heart failure.	<b>Do not</b> take if you are taking digoxin and blood pressure medications
Kelp	Commonly used supplement.	Can increase effects of blood pressure and anticoagulant medication. Causes low blood pressure and increases risk of bleeding.
Licorice root	To treat coughing, stomach ulcers and liver cirrhosis.	Increases blood pressure: <b>Do not</b> take if you have a heart condition or on heart medications.
Nettle	To treat bladder infections, kidney infections and kidney stones.	<b>Do not</b> take if you have fluid retention caused by heart failure or poor kidneys.
St Johns Wort	To treat depression and injuries.	Can increase the risk of bleeding. Can decrease the effect of digoxin. Should not be taken with certain antidepressants.
Yohimbine	To treat impotence.	Increases heart rate. Increases or decreases blood pressure.

# Medication List

Patient's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Doctor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Prescribed Medication:				
Medication Name(s)	Purpose	Description	Dosage	Frequency
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				
Non-prescription Medication:				

Medication

Join our Community of Survivors, to share, learn and connect with others who are living with heart failure. Sign up at [\*\*heartandstroke.ca/connect\*\*](https://heartandstroke.ca/connect)