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Taking Medicine to Control Heart Failure

The heart is a muscle that pumps oxygen-rich blood to all parts of the body. When you have heart failure, the heart is not able to pump as well as it should. Blood and fluid may back up into the lungs (congestive heart failure). As a result, some parts of the body won't get enough oxygen-rich blood to work normally. These problems lead to the symptoms of heart failure.

Medicines can help your heart work better, but follow your doctor's directions exactly to make sure they work as they should.

Why take your medicines?

- They help you feel better. That means you can do more of the things you enjoy.
- They help your heart work better.
- They can help you stay out of the hospital.
- They can prevent shortness of breath and swelling in your feet.
- They can improve blood flow to the rest of your body and prevent other organs from being affected.
- They may even prevent heart attack or death.

Know your medicines

You may take one or more of the medicines below. Your healthcare provider will work with you to find the best mix of medicines for you. Be sure you know which ones you take:

- **ACE inhibitors** lower blood pressure by acting on the kidneys and ease strain on the heart. This makes it easier for the heart to pump. These also help remodel the heart, which can help your heart pump better.
- **Angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs)** work like ACE inhibitors. These are prescribed for some people who can't take ACE inhibitors. Some people who take ACE inhibitors get a cough and may need to switch medicines.
- **Angiotensin receptor neprilysin inhibitor (ARNI)** is a new medicine that combines an ARB and a neprilysin inhibitor. It helps relax blood vessels and reduce stress on the heart. It also helps your body get rid of salt and fluid.
- **Sinus node I-f channel blocker** is used to reduce heart rate, which puts less stress on the heart.
- **Beta-blockers** help lower blood pressure and slow your heart rate. This eases the work on your heart. Beta-blockers may improve the heart's pumping action and strength over time. If you have severe lung disease, you may not be able to take these medicines.
- **Diuretics** ("water pills") help the body get rid of extra water by excreting salt. This helps prevent swelling, especially in your ankles. They can also help you breathe better if you have fluid in your lungs. Having less fluid to pump means your heart doesn't have to work as hard. A side effect of this medicine is having to urinate more often. Some diuretics make your body lose a mineral called potassium. Your doctor will tell you if you need to take supplements or eat more foods high in potassium. Other diuretics hold on to too much potassium. This can cause your heart to have arrhythmias. It's important to understand which medicine you're on and how it affects your potassium levels.

- **Digoxin** helps your heart pump with more strength. This helps your heart pump more blood with each beat. So more oxygen-rich blood travels to the rest of the body. This may be used when other medicines don't give enough symptom relief.
- **Aldosterone blockers** help change hormone levels help your body get rid of salt and water through the kidneys and ease strain on the heart.
- **Hydralazine and nitrates** are 2 medicines used together to treat heart failure. They may come in one “combination” pill. They lower blood pressure and decrease how hard the heart has to pump.
- **Statins** lower the amount of bad cholesterol in your blood. This improves the health of your blood vessels. While they are not used to treat heart failure, your doctor may prescribe a statin if you have high cholesterol or have had a past heart attack and are at risk for heart failure.

Tips for taking your medicine

- Take your medicines exactly as directed. Follow the directions on the label.
- Take your medicines at the same time or times each day.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember—unless it's almost time for your next dose. If so, skip the missed dose. Don't take a double dose.
- Never change the dose or stop taking a medicine unless your doctor tells you to. Tell your doctor if you don't understand how to take your medicines. Also tell your doctor if you are having trouble getting your medicines.
- If you miss too many doses, you are at risk for being admitted to the hospital for shortness of breath and worsening of heart failure symptoms.

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