

Taking medications for heart failure

The heart pumps blood throughout the body. If the heart cannot relax properly between beats, less blood than normal enters its chambers to be pumped out to the body. The flow of blood to the body may also be less than ideal if the heart cannot squeeze, or contract, with full force, particularly if the blood vessels are narrowed as well. These conditions are associated with heart failure.

Heart failure is also called congestive heart failure because the accumulation of fluid in the body is a common part of the disorder. It usually develops gradually over time. Heart failure is more common in older people, and it can interfere with how you feel and your level of activity.

Fortunately, doctors have identified a number of medications that relieve the symptoms of heart failure and help the heart work more efficiently. Some drugs even seem to prevent the condition from worsening. Two commonly used drug groups are listed below, along with a description of their activity.

Vasodilators (vay-zo-DY-lay-tors)

These medications relax the walls of arteries and veins to allow them to transport blood more effectively. Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, the nitrates, angiotensin II blockers, and hydralazine are among the most common vasodilating drugs used for heart failure.

Diuretics (dy-ya-RET-ix)

These medications work on the kidneys. They help rid the body of excess water and sodium, and this often makes breathing easier and reduces foot and ankle swelling. There are many different diuretics to choose from.

It's very important to follow your doctor's instructions when taking your medications. If you have any questions about how or when to take them or if you are concerned that you may be experiencing a side effect related to the medication, call your doctor's office.

The following medications (with their brand names in parentheses) are among those used in patients with heart failure:

Vasodilators

ACE inhibitors

Captopril (Capoten)
Enalapril (Vasotec)
Lisinopril (Prinivil, Zestril)

Nitrate

Isosorbide dinitrate
(Isordil, Sorbitrate)

Angiotensin II blockers

Irbesartan (Avapro)
Losartan (Cozaar)
Valsartan (Diovan)
Hydralazine (Apresoline)

Diuretics

Amiloride (Midamor)
Bumetanide (Bumex)
Furosemide (Lasix)
Metolazone (Mykrox, Zaroxolyn)
Spironolactone (Aldactone)
Torsemide (Demadex)
Triamterene (Dyrenium)

Instructions from your doctor
