



What Is High Blood Pressure Medication?

When your blood pressure is high, medication is an important part of your treatment plan. Your health care professional will likely recommend lifestyle changes along with your medication. You may need one or more types of medication to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level.

Every person reacts differently to medication. You may need a trial period before you find the best one, or combination of medications, for you.



Taking your medication the way your health care professional tells you to is key to reducing your blood pressure.

What should I know about high blood pressure medication?

- Different medications work in unique ways to help lower your blood pressure.
- High blood pressure medication only works when you take it as prescribed.
- You shouldn't stop taking your medication without your health care professional's approval.
- Managing blood pressure is a lifelong effort. Treatment usually continues even after your blood pressure is lowered. This keeps your blood pressure in a normal range.

What types of medication may be prescribed?

Diuretics are often the first line of treatment. These medications are sometimes called "water pills." They help control blood pressure by removing excess sodium (salt) and water from your body through urination. If diuretics don't lower your blood pressure enough, you may also be prescribed other medication.

The following medications relax and widen blood vessels. This allows blood to flow more easily, which lowers blood pressure.

- Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors
- Angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARBs)
- Calcium channel blockers
- Direct renin inhibitors
- Alpha blockers
- Central alpha-2 agonists
- Blood vessel dilators, or direct vasodilators

Another medication, called beta-blockers, helps your heart beat slower and with less force. This lowers your blood pressure.

Your health care professional will prescribe the medication, or combination of medications, that they decide is best for you. If medication cost is an issue for you, let your health care team know. They may suggest a medication that costs less. Also ask about patient assistance programs.

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What are the side effects?

Some high blood pressure medications can affect certain body functions. This may result in side effects. But the benefits of using the medications outweigh the risk of side effects in most people.

Some common side effects that may occur include:

- Weakness, tiredness or drowsiness
- Feeling thirsty
- Erectile dysfunction
- Cough
- Trouble sleeping
- Muscle cramps
- Slow or fast heartbeat
- Headache, dizziness or light-headedness
- Skin rash
- Constipation or diarrhea

If you are having side effects, don't stop taking your medication to avoid them. Work with your health care professional to find the medication or dose that works best for you.

How can I remember to take my medication?

It can be hard to remember to take your medication. To be safe, you must take it properly. These are some good ways:

- Take your medication at the same time each day.
- Take medication along with daily events, such as brushing your teeth.
- Use a weekly pill box with separate sections for each day or time of day.
- Ask family and friends to help remind you.
- Use a medication calendar.
- Set a reminder on your smartphone.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

Should I avoid any foods or medications?

What reactions or side effects should I expect?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.