

Patient Information

For : Educational Material

Beta Blockers

What are beta blockers?

Beta blockers are a class of drugs that can reduce your heart rate, blood pressure, and the amount of blood your heart pumps. Beta blockers can block the effects of the stress hormone epinephrine (adrenaline). Examples of beta blockers are atenolol (Tenormin), metoprolol (Toprol-XL), and propranolol (Inderal). Which one is best for you depends on your condition and health.

How do beta blockers work?

Epinephrine (adrenaline) is a stress hormone that makes the heart beat faster. Beta blockers can block the effects of epinephrine. This helps the heart beat more slowly and with less force. The heart does not have to work as hard because it needs less blood and oxygen. Beta blockers keep the heart from beating too fast.

When are beta blockers used?

Beta blockers are used to treat high blood pressure, reduce your risk of coronary artery disease, and correct abnormal heart rhythms. They have few serious side effects. Beta blockers are often the only drugs needed to treat high blood pressure. An extra benefit is that beta blockers work well when combined with other drugs for blood pressure treatment.

Beta blockers are used to treat angina (chest pain) caused by heart disease. Angina occurs when there is not enough oxygen-carrying blood to supply the heart muscle. If your coronary arteries are blocked, you can't get the proper amount of blood to your heart muscle. Beta blockers slow the heart rate and slightly decrease the strength of heart muscle contraction (squeezing). These effects reduce your heart muscle's need for oxygen and reduce or prevent angina.

Beta blockers are used to correct abnormal heart rhythms. Symptoms may range from an occasional irregular heartbeat to spells of a very fast heart rate. Beta blockers can make your heart rhythm regular and prevent uncomfortable symptoms due to an irregular or fast heart rate.

If you have heart failure caused by a weakened heart muscle, you may benefit from treatment with beta blockers. Because beta blockers can actually worsen heart failure when given quickly in high doses, your healthcare provider will start at a very low dose and gradually increase the dose over a few

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weeks.

Beta blockers may also help prevent migraine headaches, treat glaucoma, or treat certain types of tremors.

There are many different types of beta blockers. Each one is used by the body in a slightly different way. Because of the differences, your healthcare provider will decide which type and dosage of beta blocker are right for you.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

Most of the side effects are minor, but people with some conditions need to use beta blockers with caution. For example, if you have chronic lung disease or asthma, you may have more lung problems when taking certain beta blockers. If you are a diabetic, your blood sugar levels and response to insulin may change.

Some people complain of cold hands or feet while on the drugs. Others with a blood vessel condition called Raynaud's phenomenon may become worse. Some people complain of a loss of sexual desire. Coronary heart disease and angina may become worse if you stop taking beta blockers suddenly. Beta blockers sometimes cause tiredness and nightmares. Sometimes, they cause the heart to beat too slowly.

Beta blockers may make some people with heart failure worse. On the other hand, some people with severe heart failure feel much better with the medicine.

Report these side effects to your healthcare provider right away:

- swelling in your legs or ankles
- cold hands and feet
- trouble breathing or wheezing
- severe fatigue
- dizziness or fainting spells
- frequent nightmares.

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treatment by a healthcare professional.