

Greenwich Hospital

Medications after Hospitalization for Congestive Heart Failure

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

Why are prescribed medications important?

Treatment for congestive heart failure (CHF) focuses on the cause of the failure and the resulting symptoms. Generally, medications are given to make the heart pump blood more effectively. Medications are most effective when taken as prescribed by your doctor. They will decrease your risk of having a relapse or “exacerbation” of CHF.

It is important to know the names of your medications and how they work. Your doctor will decide which medications are best for you. Below are some common classifications of medications that are ordered for CHF.

ACE (Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme) Inhibitors and ARB’s (Angiotensin Receptor Blockers)

These classes of medications make blood vessels open up and therefore cause blood pressure to drop. By reducing blood pressure, there is less strain on the heart and the heart does not have to work as hard. A common side effect for both classes of these medications is dizziness. A common side effect for ACE inhibitors is a cough.

Diuretics (water pills)

This class of medications helps the kidneys to get rid of extra water and sodium in the body. By excreting excess water and salt, the heart is able to function more efficiently. A desired effect is increased urination, so it may be helpful to take diuretics in the morning to reduce the number of times needed to get up during the night to urinate.

Spirolactone or eplerenone

These medications also help to decrease sodium and water in the body. In addition, they slow the breakdown of heart muscle tissue. Potassium levels are frequently checked while on these. These medications should not be used in patients who have kidney disease.

Digoxin (also called Lanoxin)

This medication increases the force of the heart's contractions and can slow down certain types of irregular heart rhythms.

Beta Blockers

With CHF, the heart is being continuously worked and stressed. This class of medications helps to decrease the work of the heart. They also allow the heart to beat in a more productive manner at a decreased rate. Common side effects include tiredness and lower blood pressure.

What other points are important?

It is important to let all of your health care providers know that you have been diagnosed with CHF. Keep them informed of the medications you are taking and any changes in your medication prescriptions. Also, it is very important to keep a list of your medications with you in the event of an emergency visit to the hospital.

Be careful of over-the-counter drugs (those that can be bought without a prescription). They may cause "drug interactions" with your prescription medications, or side effects that happen when some medications are taken together. Always check with your doctor before taking a new over-the-counter drug.



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