

Medicines for cardiovascular disease

There is a wide range of medicines used to treat cardiovascular disease and related risk factors such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Depending on your condition and symptoms, it is not unusual for your doctor to prescribe a combination of these:

- 🔔 **Nitrates** – help enlarge blood vessels to improve blood flow to the heart. These are commonly used to treat angina (e.g. anginine tablets).
- 🔔 **ACE Inhibitors** – help prevent the blood vessels from constricting (tightening) to assist the pumping function of the heart. These are commonly used to lower blood pressure and treat chronic heart failure.
- 🔔 **Diuretics** – helps rid your body of sodium and water to reduce blood pressure.
- 🔔 **Beta-blockers** – help to lower heart rate and blood pressure and control angina symptoms. These are commonly used to treat chronic heart failure.
- 🔔 **Statins** – help to lower cholesterol levels.
- 🔔 **Aspirin** – helps to prevent blood clots that lead to heart attack and stroke.
- 🔔 **Warfarin** – a stronger treatment than aspirin to prevent blood clots in high risk individuals and treat an existing blood clot (e.g. deep vein thrombosis in the leg).
- 🔔 **Clopidogrel** – often used in conjunction with aspirin following cardiac surgery or for recurrent heart attack or angina.

Important information

If you or anyone you are with has taken a medicine overdose, ring the Poisons Information Line on 131 126. Even if there are no immediate signs of poisoning treatment may be needed urgently.

Your health care team including doctor, hospital staff and pharmacist can answer questions about your medicines.



Wise Use of Medicines

Quality use of medicines helps to manage many disorders and reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease, including having a fatal heart attack or stroke.

We aim to reduce death and disability from cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other health disorders related to obesity through research, clinical care, education and advocacy.

**For more information contact
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The facts

Almost one half of individuals prescribed medicines are at risk of not gaining the maximum benefits from their treatment by forgetting or intentionally not taking their medicines! Those reaching optimal treatment levels have been consistently shown to have better health outcomes.

What is a medicine?

A medicine (drug) is a chemical substance that causes a change in the body. Medicines can include prescription (ordered by a doctor and dispensed by a pharmacist), non-prescription (bought “over-the-counter” from pharmacies or from supermarkets), or complementary (herbal or alternative) medicines.

All medicines work best when combined with a healthy diet and lifestyle to help you to feel better and live longer.

Why are medicines important?

Medicines relieve symptoms, treat, or reduce the severity of an illness or medical condition. They may also be prescribed to help to reduce the risk of having a heart attack, stroke, angina or heart failure.

If used incorrectly or unwisely, there is a risk that some medicines may not be effective and will cause unwanted or dangerous effects, even harm. This risk is greater if you:

- ❗ Have kidney, liver or stomach problems.
- ❗ Are pregnant or are breastfeeding.
- ❗ Are allergic to any substances in the medicines.
- ❗ Drink alcohol.



Tips for taking medicines

To minimise the risk of medicines causing problems:

- ❗ Read the labels and detailed product information sheet that comes with your medicine carefully – always take the right dose and exactly as prescribed.
- ❗ “Time it right” – take medicines at the same time every day and check whether they need to be taken with food. If you miss a dose, refer to the product information sheet or ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.
- ❗ Do not stop taking medicines or alter dosages if you are feeling better, without your treating doctor’s guidance and approval.
- ❗ Check the expiry date prior to consumption and do not take outdated medicines.
- ❗ Do not use other people’s medicines or share your own with anyone else.
- ❗ Discuss any possible side effects with your doctor, including when they improve or worsen.



Staying informed

To assist in taking your medicines, ensure that you:

- ❗ Clearly understand the name, what it does, possible side effects and risks, and why and how you should take the medicine, including what foods, alcohol and other medicines should be avoided.
- ❗ Tell your doctor all of the medicines you are taking and review them with your doctor and pharmacist regularly to verify their effectiveness.
- ❗ Know how your medicine might affect you before driving, operating machinery or doing jobs that require you to be alert.
- ❗ Carry a list of current medicines with you at all times as well as keep a medicine log to note the name, dosage, directions of use, possible side effects, defining features (e.g. colour and shape), and the prescribing doctor of your medicines.

Store your medicines well

Keep medicines in their original containers or packets and keep them in a place out of reach and sight of children. Store them in a dry cool place away from direct sunlight or heat and avoid damp places like bathrooms and kitchens. Return all out-of-date or unwanted medicines to your pharmacy for safe disposal.

