

Calcium Channel Blockers

Calcium channel blockers help relax the blood vessels. Relaxed blood vessels expand and allow blood to flow more easily at a lower blood pressure. There are several different medicines in the group called “calcium channel blocking agents” used to treat high blood pressure.



How They're Used

Calcium channel blockers are taken as tablets, as capsules, or by injection. They are taken one or more times a day, depending on the drug chosen by your doctor and your particular needs. Most tablets and capsules should be swallowed whole, without crushing or chewing. Follow all your doctor's instructions about taking a calcium channel blocker, including whether to take it on an empty stomach or with food.

Your doctor may order another blood pressure medicine for you to take with your calcium channel blocker. Many people require two or more medicines to bring their blood pressure to a healthy level.



Side Effects

Calcium channel blockers can sometimes cause drowsiness, constipation, dizziness, headache, nausea, and fatigue. Always talk with your doctor about these or any other side effects you might have. If you should have trouble breathing; an irregular heartbeat; a skin rash; or swelling of the ankles, feet, or lower legs, contact your doctor right away.

Special Notes

Older adults may be extrasensitive to some of the common side effects of calcium channel blockers. So, a lower starting dose may be needed.

Treatment for high blood pressure may include stopping smoking, controlling weight, and limiting the amount of sodium (salt) in your diet. Follow your doctor's advice.

Since many people with high blood pressure don't experience any symptoms from their condition, it's important to take medication exactly as prescribed and to see your doctor regularly, even if you feel fine.

Left untreated, high blood pressure can lead to serious heart problems, stroke, and kidney disease. While medicine won't cure high blood pressure, it does help control it. That's why you need to take it—possibly for the rest of your life—to manage your blood pressure.

Always speak with your doctor first before you stop taking your calcium channel blocker.

Some medicines you can buy without a prescription might *increase* your blood pressure. This is especially true for products intended for appetite control, asthma, colds, cough, hay fever, or sinus problems. Don't take these or any other medicines without discussing it with your doctor.

Tips for Taking This Medicine

- Take your calcium channel blocker medicine exactly as prescribed, as often as directed, without skipping any doses—even if you feel fine
- If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose, and go back to your regular schedule. Do not double dose
- Make sure you have enough medication on hand to last through weekends, holidays, or vacations
- Make sure your doctor knows about any allergies and any other medical problem you have, especially heart conditions, or kidney or liver disease
- Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant or become pregnant while taking this or any other medicine

Remember

Blood pressure treatment begins with lifestyle changes: weight management; exercise; a low-salt, healthy diet; stopping smoking; and decreased alcohol intake. Even if you take medicine to help lower your blood pressure, you still need to make lifestyle changes recommended by your doctor.