

ACE Inhibitors

(Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme Inhibitors)

ACE inhibitors are medicines that limit the body's ability to form a hormone called angiotensin II. This hormone normally causes blood vessels to become narrower. ACE inhibitors help the blood vessels to expand, so blood pressure goes down.



How They're Used

ACE inhibitors come in several forms including tablets, capsules, and liquid. They are taken either once or twice a day, depending on the form and dosage of the medicine. Your doctor may want you to take an ACE inhibitor along with another type of medicine called a diuretic, which removes excess water and sodium from the body. Many people require two or more medicines to bring their blood pressure to a healthy level.

Side Effects

ACE inhibitors can sometimes cause a dry cough, a headache, diarrhea, nausea, or tiredness. Talk with your doctor if these symptoms are a problem or don't go away. Some less-common side effects are dizziness, skin rash, abdominal pain, and chest pain. Let your doctor know right away if you experience any of these side effects. Rarely, people taking ACE inhibitors develop fever and chills; hoarseness; or swelling of the face, mouth, hands, or feet. If these side effects occur, contact your doctor immediately.

Special Notes

Do not take other medicines without discussing them with your doctor. This especially applies to nonprescription medicines for appetite control, asthma, colds, cough, hay fever, or sinus problems. These products may increase your blood pressure.

After you first take an ACE inhibitor, you may become dizzy or light-headed, especially if you are also taking a diuretic. Use caution when driving or running machinery.

Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages until you've discussed this with your doctor.

Contact your doctor if you have continuing nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea; chills, fever, or sore throat; swelling in the mouth or throat area; or strong stomach pain.

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

Since many people with high blood pressure may not experience any symptoms of their condition, it's important for you to take your 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 will help to control it. That's why you need to take it—possibly for the rest of your life—to manage your blood pressure.

Tips for Taking This Medicine

- Take your ACE inhibitor medicine exactly as prescribed, as often as prescribed
- Before you have any kind of surgery (including dental surgery) or emergency treatment, advise the doctor or dentist that you take an ACE inhibitor
- If you miss a dose of your ACE inhibitor, take it as soon as possible. But if it's almost time for your next dose, skip the one you missed, and go back to your regular schedule. Do not take double doses
- Make sure you have enough medication on hand to last through weekends, holidays, or vacations
- Make sure your doctor knows about any allergies you have and if you're on a low-sodium diet. Tell your doctor if you have any other medical problems, especially diabetes; or heart, blood-vessel, or kidney disease
- Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, or become pregnant while taking this or any other medicine. Taking ACE inhibitors during pregnancy, especially after the first 3 months, can cause harm or even death to the fetus



Remember

Treatment for high blood pressure 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.