

# Diuretics

Diuretics, also known as water pills, are commonly prescribed to heart failure patients who have fluid buildup in their bodies. A diuretic makes the kidneys get rid of excess sodium and water and helps relieve symptoms such as shortness of breath and leg swelling.



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## *How They're Used*

There are several types of diuretics that remove fluid at different rates with different methods. Diuretics aren't used alone in heart failure patients but usually in combination with other drugs, such as ACE inhibitors, beta-blockers, and digitalis.

Diuretics are usually given once or twice a day. Most patients start with a low dose, then increase as necessary. Sometimes, doctors will advise patients to weigh themselves daily and adjust the dosage of the diuretic based on weight gain or loss due to fluid.

## *Side Effects*

Some patients who take diuretics feel dizzy or light-headed, especially when getting up from sitting or lying down. Since some diuretics can cause a loss of potassium from your body, your doctor may recommend high-potassium foods (like oranges or bananas) or supplements. Be sure to tell your doctor if you have severe or extended nausea, vomiting or diarrhea; this will help avoid the loss of too much water and potassium.



## *Special Notes*

Diuretics help to relieve symptoms fast—within hours or days. And they effectively control the water retention of heart failure.

You must see your doctor regularly while using diuretics so that your progress can be checked and your dosage changed if necessary.

Before taking diuretics, it's important to tell your doctor about any allergies you have, what other medicines you're taking, and whether you have any other medical problems.

## *Tips for Taking Your Medicine*

Discuss possible problems with your doctor. For example

- Try to take your diuretic in the morning, so bathroom visits to urinate occur during the day. If you take your diuretic in the evening or at night, you may have to interrupt your sleep to use the bathroom
- If you miss a dose of diuretic medicine, take it as soon as you can, but don't take double doses. If it's almost time for your next dose, skip the one you missed and return to your normal schedule
- Take your diuretic medicine exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Don't change your dosage unless your doctor tells you to

# Remember

In combination with other medicines for heart failure, diuretics can be very helpful in removing fluid from the body, relieving swelling and shortness of breath. Be sure to take your diuretic as prescribed, and see your doctor regularly so your progress can be checked.