



Medications

Your healthcare provider is likely to discuss diet and exercise plans with you. Along with adopting these healthy living habits, you may need further treatment. If this is true, your doctor is likely to prescribe medications.

Your doctor may prescribe one, or a combination, of these.

- **Diuretics.** Often called “water pills,” diuretics lower blood pressure by increasing urination, thereby lowering the amount of water in the body. They are very effective for most people, and doctors often prescribe them first.
- **ACE inhibitors.** Known formally as angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors, these drugs block production of a substance that constricts blood vessels. They also slow atherosclerosis and help treat people with heart failure. The drawback of ACE inhibitors is that they sometimes cause a persistent cough. Similar drugs, called angiotensin-receptor blockers, are less likely to cause cough and may be prescribed instead.
- **Beta-blockers.** These medications limit the effect of stress-induced hormones. As a result, heart rate slows and the heart beats with less force, reducing the workload on the heart.
- **Calcium-channel blockers.** These dilate the coronary arteries, reducing blood pressure and the force of the heart’s contractions. They can be helpful for people who can’t tolerate other blood pressure medications.

- **Statins.** Considered one of the most important drug advances of the 20th century, these drugs greatly reduce blood levels of LDL (“bad”) cholesterol and slightly raise blood levels of HDL (“good”) cholesterol. Statins also can stabilize plaque in artery walls, promote the growth of new blood vessels, and calm inflammation. Although statins do not work for everyone, they are the drug of choice in treating high cholesterol.
- **Fibric acid derivatives.** These drugs block the production and activity of proteins that carry cholesterol in the bloodstream.
- **Niacin.** This B vitamin, when taken in doses higher than the recommended daily allowance, acts as a drug. It interferes with the liver’s manufacture of LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. When taken along with a statin, niacin can lower LDL and triglycerides and raise HDL (“good”) cholesterol.
- **Antiplatelets/Anticoagulants.** Help reduce the risk that a blood clot will form.
- **Nitroglycerin.** Along with other nitrate drugs, nitroglycerin relaxes blood-vessel walls, lowering blood pressure and putting less strain on the heart. A certain form of nitroglycerin that is placed under the tongue can alleviate an attack of angina.

Using Fast-Acting Nitroglycerin

Fast-acting nitroglycerin comes in tablet or spray form.

A dose is one spray or one tablet. The usual way to take it is described below. If your doctor has told you differently, then follow his or her instructions.

- Sit down before you take your dose. The medication may make you feel dizzy.
- Place a tablet under your tongue. Let the tablet dissolve completely. **Don’t swallow it.** If you do, it won’t work. If using spray, spray once inside your cheek.
- Wait 5 minutes. If the angina goes away, rest awhile and return to your normal routine.
- If your angina lasts longer than 5 minutes, or gets worse, **call 911 immediately.** Do not delay. You may be having a heart attack. (To learn more about heart attack symptoms, see page 8.)
- After you call 911, take a second dose of nitroglycerin. Wait another 5 minutes. If the angina still does not go away, take a third dose. You can take up to 3 doses within 15 minutes. Stay on the phone with 911 for further instructions.

Other Information for Nitroglycerin

- Carry a few doses with you at all times. Store the rest in its container in a dry, dark place.
- Check the expiration date on the bottle from time to time. Refill your prescription and discard any expired medication.
- Talk to your doctor before using nitroglycerin if you are taking medications for erectile dysfunction.

Aspirin and Your Heart

Aspirin is sometimes prescribed to help prevent a heart attack. Use aspirin therapy only if directed by your doctor. If you have certain health problems or take certain medications, daily use of aspirin may not be right for you.

If you think you’re having a heart attack, taking aspirin in addition to fast-acting nitroglycerin might be helpful. Ask your doctor about this ahead of time. Then you’ll know what to do in an emergency.