

Common Medications after Cardiac Surgery

Common Medications after Cardiac Surgery

- This pamphlet lists common medications that you **may** be prescribed after cardiac (heart) surgery.
- You **may not** be prescribed all of the medications in this pamphlet.
- You may also be prescribed other medications that are not on this list.

Acetylsalicylic acid (ASA)

Brand Name: Aspirin®

Why do I need this medication?

- ASA lowers the risk of a heart attack or a stroke by making your blood less likely to clot.
- It is usually taken long-term after a heart attack or bypass surgery.

How do I take it?

- ASA comes as:
 - › Tablets (enteric-coated)
 - › Tablets (regular and chewable)
- Take it once a day. You can take it with or without food.

- Swallow enteric-coated tablets and regular tablets whole. **Do not** crush or chew them.
- Chewable tablets may be chewed or swallowed whole.

Common side effects:

- Upset stomach, heartburn
 - › It may help to take ASA with food.
- Minor bleeding (like bruising or mild nosebleeds)
 - › Severe (very bad) bleeding is rare.

Important:

- Ask your health care provider or your pharmacist before taking any other medication, including over-the-counter products, while taking ASA.
- **Do not take ibuprofen (Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®) unless your prescribing health care provider says it is OK.** Taking them with ASA can raise your risk of bleeding.
- It is safe to take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) with ASA.

Clopidogrel

Brand name: Plavix®

Why do I need this medication?

- Clopidogrel lowers the risk of heart attack or stroke by making your blood less likely to clot.
- It is usually taken for 1 to 12 months after a heart attack or heart bypass surgery.

How do I take it?

- Clopidogrel comes as tablet.
- Take it once a day. You can take it with or without food.

Common side effects:

- Minor bleeding (like bruising or mild nosebleeds)
 - › Severe bleeding is rare.

Important:

- Ask your health care provider or your pharmacist before taking any other medication, including over-the-counter products, while taking clopidogrel.
- **Do not take ibuprofen (Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®) unless your prescribing health care provider says it is OK.** Taking these with clopidogrel can raise your risk of bleeding.
- It is safe to take ASA with clopidogrel.

- You may need to stop taking clopidogrel before medical or dental procedures. **Tell all of your health care providers, including your dentist, that you are taking clopidogrel.**

ACE inhibitors

Why do I need this medication?

- Angiotensin Converting Enzyme (ACE) inhibitors can be used to treat:
 - › High blood pressure
 - › Certain heart conditions (like heart attacks, heart failure)
 - › Kidney disease
- Examples:
 - › Enalapril (Vasotec®)
 - › Lisinopril (Prinivil®, Zestril®)
 - › Perindopril (Coversyl®)
 - › Ramipril (Altace®)
 - › Trandolapril (Mavik®)

How do I take it?

- An ACE inhibitor is usually taken 1 or 2 times a day.

Common side effects:

- Low blood pressure (usually gets better over time)
- Dizziness (often goes away on its own)
- ACE cough (happens in 5 to 35% of people). This is a persistent (ongoing), dry cough. It can happen weeks or months after starting this medication.
 - › If this happens, you may need to stop taking your medication or switch to another type of ACE inhibitor.
 - › **Do not stop taking your medication without talking to your health care provider or your pharmacist first.**

Important:

- ACE inhibitors can cause potassium to build up in the blood. Your health care provider **may** ask you to have blood work done regularly to check your potassium levels.
- ACE inhibitors can affect how your kidneys work. Your health care provider **may** ask you to have blood work done regularly to check how well your kidneys are working.
- Ask your health care provider or your pharmacist before taking any other medication, including over-the-counter products, while taking an ACE inhibitor.

Beta blockers

Why do I need this medication?

- Beta blockers help your heart beat slower and at a more steady rate, so it does not have to work as hard.
- This medication can be used to:
 - › Treat high blood pressure
 - › Treat angina (chest pain)
 - › Treat or prevent cardiac arrhythmias (irregular heart rhythms)
 - › Treat heart failure
 - › Lower the risk of repeated heart attacks
- Examples:
 - › Metoprolol (Lopressor[®], Betaloc[®])
 - › Atenolol (Tenormin[®])
 - › Carvedilol (Coreg[®])
 - › Bisoprolol (Monacor[®])

How do I take it?

- A beta blocker is taken 1 or 2 times a day. You can take it with or without food.

Side effects:

- Lightheadedness
 - › It may help to take your time when you change positions (for example, lying to sitting or sitting to standing).
- Low blood pressure
- Dizziness
- Tiredness
- Nightmares

Important:

- **Do not stop taking this medication without talking to your health care provider first.** You may need to take lower doses (amounts) over time before stopping.

Statins

Why do I need this medication?

- Statins lower your cholesterol and prevent heart attacks.
- Examples:
 - › Atorvastatin (Lipitor®)
 - › Pravastatin (Pravachol®)
 - › Rosuvastatin (Crestor®)
 - › Simvastatin (Zocor®)

How do I take it?

- Take it once a day. You can take it with or without food.

Common side effects:

- Sore leg muscles
- Stomach upset, diarrhea (loose, watery poop)

Important:

- Statins help lower cholesterol, but you must also make lifestyle changes (like following a healthy eating plan and exercising).
- Statins can affect your how your liver works. Your health care provider may ask you to have blood work regularly to check how well your liver is working.

Nitroglycerin (nitro) spray

Brand name: Nitrolingual[®] Pumpspray

Why do I need this medication?

- Nitro spray opens the blood vessels (the tubes that carry blood through your body) for a short time. This lets more blood and oxygen flow to your heart.
- It is used to treat angina (also called chest pain).

How do I take it?

1. Hold the container upright (straight up and down). Take off the cover. **Do not shake the container.**
2. Spray into the air until you see a mist (about 5 times).
3. Open your mouth and press the button firmly to release 1 spray under or onto your tongue. **Do not breathe in the spray.**
4. Relax and wait 5 minutes.
5. If you still have angina, take a second spray.
6. Wait another 5 minutes.
7. If you still have angina, take a third spray.
8. **If you still have chest pain or discomfort after taking 3 sprays in 15 minutes, call 911 right away. Do not drive yourself to the Emergency Department.**

Side effects:

- Headache
- Feeling dizzy
- Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- Fast heartbeat
- Flushing (face feels warm and turns pink, red, or darker in colour)

Important:

- **Always carry your nitro spray with you.**
- **Nitro spray can cause a severe drop in blood pressure when taken within 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days) of some erectile dysfunction medications, like sildenafil (Viagra®), tadalafil (Cialis®), or vardenafil (Levitra®).**
 - › **If you have recently taken erectile dysfunction medication and you feel like you may need nitro spray, call 811 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

Pain management

- **There are many medications you can use after surgery to manage your pain. Some common pain medications include:**

Acetaminophen

Brand name: Tylenol®

- **Acetaminophen helps with mild pain and inflammation (swelling).**
- **It is taken by mouth.**
- **You can take it every 4 to 6 hours, or as needed. Follow the instructions on the package.**

Naproxen

- Naproxen helps with inflammation.
- It is taken by mouth.
- You can take it every 8 hours or as needed.
Take it with food to prevent an upset stomach.

Hydromorphone

Brand name: Dilaudid®

- Hydromorphone helps with severe pain after surgery. It is given to you after surgery while you are in the hospital. It is not commonly prescribed for when you go home.
- It is taken by mouth.
- Take it as prescribed, as needed.

Common side effects:

- Dizziness
- Tiredness
- Constipation (not being able to poop)
- Nausea
- Vomiting (throwing up)

Important:

- **Do not drive while taking this medication.**

Other medications you may be prescribed

Colchicine

Why do I need this medication?

- Colchicine helps with inflammation. It lowers your risk of heart attack and stroke after having surgery or a heart attack.

How do I take it?

- Take colchicine once a day. You can take it with or without food.

Common side effects:

- Diarrhea

Important:

- **Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while taking colchicine.**
- Ask your health care provider or your pharmacist before taking any other medication, including over-the-counter products, while taking colchicine.

Amiodarone

Why do I need this medication?

- Amiodarone treats and prevents irregular heart rhythms.

How do I take it?

- Amiodarone is usually taken 1 or 2 times a day. Take it with food to prevent an upset stomach.

Common side effects:

- Amiodarone can cause liver, thyroid, eye, lung, and nerve problems with long-term use. If you take amiodarone for more than 1 year, your prescribing health care provider will ask you to have regular blood tests, chest X-rays, and eye exams.

Important:

- **Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while taking amiodarone.**
- Amiodarone can make your skin more sensitive to sunlight. **Make sure you wear sunscreen or cover your skin when you are out in the sun.**
- Ask your health care provider or your pharmacist before taking any other medication (including over-the-counter products) while taking amiodarone.
- **Do not stop taking this medication without talking to your health care provider first.**
 - › Amiodarone is usually taken in lower doses over time before stopping. This is often done over several weeks.

Diuretics

Why do I need this medication?

- It is very common to have extra fluid in your body after surgery.
- Diuretics (also called **water pills**) lower your blood pressure or remove extra fluid from your body.
- There are many types of diuretics. Each type is used for a different purpose. Some common diuretics include:

Furosemide

Brand name: Lasix®

- Some heart conditions can cause extra fluid to build up in your body. This can cause breathing problems or swelling in your legs. Furosemide removes extra fluid.
- You may need to take it for a short time after surgery.
- Take furosemide 1 or 2 times a day.

Hydrochlorothiazide, indapamide, and chlorthalidone

- These medications lower your blood pressure.
- Take this medication once a day.

Common side effects of all diuretics include:

- Dizziness or feeling lightheaded
- Low potassium
- Urinating (peeing) often. This is most common with furosemide.
 - › **Do not** take this medication before you go to sleep at night.

If you have any questions:

- Please talk with your primary health care provider or your pharmacist. They can call the Cardiac Surgery team for more information, if needed.

Cardiac Surgery

- › Phone: 902-473-8531

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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