

Amiodarone (Cordarone®)

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What is amiodarone?

- Amiodarone is part of a group of medications called **antiarrhythmics**.
- Antiarrhythmic medications help your heart beat in a regular rhythm.
- The brand name for amiodarone is Cordarone®.

How does this medication work?

- Your heart has an electrical system made up of cells. Sometimes these cells beat in an irregular (disorganized) way.
- Amiodarone works by blocking certain electrical signals in the heart that cause an irregular heartbeat. This helps to:
 - › Keep your heart beating in a regular rhythm
 - › Slow your heartbeat

Why do I need this medication?

- You may need amiodarone if you have an irregular heart rhythm.
- An irregular heart rhythm can be caused by a disease (like atrial fibrillation or ventricular tachycardia).

How do I take this medication?

- Take amiodarone orally (by mouth) at the same time each day (usually 1 or 2 times a day).
- Take it with food to help prevent stomach upset, if needed.
- Your dose (amount) may change often during your first few weeks of taking amiodarone. This medication is often started at a high dose, then tapered (slowly lowered over time) to a lower dose to be taken long term.

What if I miss a dose?

- Take the missed dose as soon as you remember.
 - › If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and take your next scheduled dose.
- **Never take 2 doses at the same time.**

Medications and foods to avoid or consider adjusting

- Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice. It can increase the effect of amiodarone.
- Amiodarone can affect how some other medications work, like:
 - › Warfarin (Coumadin®)
 - › Digoxin (Lanoxin®)
- Your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) or cardiologist (heart doctor) may lower your dose of these medications when you start taking amiodarone.
- Talk with your primary health care provider or pharmacist before taking any other medications, including over-the-counter products, herbal products, vitamins, and supplements.
- It takes a long time for amiodarone to leave the body. This means it can keep affecting other medications you take even after you stop taking it.

Warnings



- Check with your primary health care provider before taking amiodarone if you have:
 - › Liver disease
 - › Lung disease
 - › Thyroid disease
- **Do not** take this medication if you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant.
- **Do not** take this medication if you are breastfeeding or chestfeeding.
- **Do not** take this medication if you are allergic to iodine.

What are your questions?

Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.

Call your primary health care provider or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if you have:

- A lot of dizziness or if you faint
- Signs of an allergic reaction, like:
 - › A skin rash
 - › Very bad itching
 - › Hives
 - › Swelling or tingling of your face, tongue, or throat
 - › Trouble breathing
 - › Chest tightness
- Bad chest pain
- A very slow heartbeat (less than 50 beats a minute)
- Skin that is blistering, peeling, or red
- Red, irritated eyes
- Sores in your mouth, throat, or nose
- A fast, pounding, or uneven heartbeat that is new or getting worse
- Shortness of breath or a dry cough that does not go away

What are the possible side effects?

Common side effects

- Nausea (upset stomach)
- Constipation (not being able to poop)
- Diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Trouble sleeping
- Lower appetite (feeling less hungry)
- Sun sensitivity (your skin could burn more easily in the sun)
 - › **When you are outside, always wear sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher, cover your skin, and wear a hat.**

Some of these side effects may go away as your body gets used to the medication.

Long-term side effects

Lung problems:

- › Cough
- › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- › Chest pain
- › Shortness of breath or trouble breathing

Liver problems:

- › Skin or whites of the eyes become yellow (called **jaundice**)

Eye problems:

- › Blurred vision
- › Blue-green halos around lights
- › Dry eyes
- › Sensitivity to light

Skin problems:

- › Skin becomes blue-gray

Muscle or nerve problems:

- › Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet
- › Tremors or shakiness
- › Weakness
- › Unusual or uncontrollable movements

Hypothyroid (low thyroid):

- › Sensitivity to heat or cold
- › Gaining weight without trying
- › Slow heartbeat
- › Dry skin, brittle nails, hair loss
- › Tiredness, weakness

Hyperthyroid (high thyroid) or thyrotoxicosis:

- › Heat intolerance (not being able to handle warm temperatures)
- › Losing weight without trying
- › Fast, irregular heartbeat
- › Trouble sleeping
- › Feeling anxious

Monitoring

- While you are taking amiodarone, you should have the following tests to check for problems:
 - › **ECG/EKG:** Every 6 months
 - › **Thyroid function tests:** Every 6 months
 - › **Liver function tests:** Every 6 to 12 months
 - › **Chest X-ray:** Every 12 months
 - › **Eye exam:** Every 12 months

These tests will be arranged by your cardiologist.

How do I store this medication?

- Store amiodarone at room temperature.
- Keep it away from heat, moisture, and direct light.
- Keep it out of the reach of children and pets.

This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your health care provider. We are here to help you.

Notes:

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.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

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

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