

Heart Failure Medications: Diuretics

You have been prescribed a Diuretic, also often known as a “water pill,” to help manage your heart failure symptoms.

To understand what a Diuretic does, it’s helpful to review how the heart works and what happens during heart failure.

The heart is a muscle that pumps oxygen and nutrient rich blood through your body. Your cells and tissues depend on a steady flow of blood.

However, when you have heart failure, your weakened heart can’t pump enough blood to meet your body’s needs.

At first, you may not notice any symptoms. This is because your heart works harder to make up for the weakness.

Over time, however, your heart can’t keep up and begins to change. The heart walls become thicker and your heart may enlarge.

Eventually, you may begin to notice symptoms as the changes in your heart continue to worsen.

One of the main symptoms of heart failure is swelling. The weakened heart causes blood to back up in your blood vessels.

As a result, your kidneys, which help remove excess sodium and water from your blood, can’t do their job as well.

The excess fluid leaks from your blood vessels into the surrounding tissues, causing swelling.

The most common places to notice swelling are your feet, ankles, legs, and waist.

And when the fluid leaks into your lungs it is called pulmonary edema.

Taking your diuretic medication can help.

Diuretics help your kidneys remove more water and sodium from your blood system than they normally would. This helps to reduce fluid build-up.

You will need to urinate more often when taking a Diuretic.

“Too much fluid is also-- for me is bad because my body doesn’t get rid of the fluid as quickly. So I actually have to have diuretics to actually do that for me.”

There are several types of Diuretics available.

Diuretics that may be prescribed include the medications listed here:

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This list includes generic and brand names, but it's important to know that new medications are introduced regularly. Talk to your healthcare provider about which one is right for you.

As with any medication there may be some side effects.

Some common side effects of Diuretics include frequent urination, headaches, increased thirst, rash, cramps, weakness, dizziness, low levels of potassium in your blood, and erectile dysfunction.

If you experience any of these or other side effects, contact your healthcare provider. You may need to have your prescription changed.

If you have difficulty breathing, chest pain, irregular heartbeat, can't swallow, or are lightheaded, immediately call 911 or your emergency response number so an ambulance can be sent.

At your healthcare appointments your healthcare provider will monitor your kidney function and potassium levels to make sure your Diuretic is working for you.

“Sometimes with my sister I’ll notice this: She’ll fidget with her bracelets. And when she fidgets with her bracelets, “Have you taken your Lasix?” Because her bracelets leave prints on her arm when she’s fluid overload and sometimes she doesn’t pay attention to that.”

Taking your Diuretic as prescribed will reduce fluid buildup, allowing you to feel better and manage your heart failure for the long-term.