Beta-blockers are drugs that are prescribed for heart failure, a common condition where the heart does not fail, but has difficulty pumping enough blood to meet the body’s needs. Beta-blockers improve heart function by preventing the heart from working too hard. In the long run, beta-blockers improve the symptoms of heart failure. Beta-blockers can also reduce your risk for hospitalization, slow the advancement of your disease, and prolong your life.
**How are beta-blockers prescribed?**

The beta-blockers used to treat heart failure are available as either “immediate-release” tablets that often require multiple doses throughout the day, or “extended-release” tablets that are usually taken only once a day. Beta-blockers come in tablets and capsules. Talk to your doctor about which type is best for you.

Patients are usually started on a low dose of a beta-blocker, and the dose is gradually increased over time as needed.

Your doctor may also prescribe additional medicines to treat your heart condition such as:

- Diuretics (water pills) to reduce the amount of extra salt and fluid in the body
- ACE inhibitors to open up blood vessels and make it easier for the heart to pump blood to various organs
- Digitalis (digoxin) to increase the strength of the heart beat

**What changes can I expect when I start taking a beta-blocker?**

Patients sometimes experience a temporary worsening of some symptoms when they start taking beta-blockers. At first, you may experience increased shortness of breath, fatigue, and some dizziness. You may also observe a temporary increase in your fluid retention. Let your doctor know if you experience any of these side effects, but do not stop taking the medicine without first checking with your doctor.
**Why did my doctor give me a beta-blocker?**

Beta-blockers are often given to patients when they come into the office for a checkup. Even though you may only be feeling a little short of breath when exercising, your doctor may start you on beta-blocker therapy as part of a continuing effort to improve your heart condition and prevent serious complications. It is important to start beta-blocker therapy early in the course of your heart failure treatment in order to slow the advancement of your heart condition.

**Do not stop taking this medicine without first checking with your doctor.**

Your doctor may want you to reduce gradually the amount you are taking before stopping completely. Some conditions such as chest pain (angina pectoris) and heart rhythm abnormalities (arrhythmias) may become worse when the medicine is stopped suddenly, and the danger of heart attack is increased in some patients.

Make sure that you have enough medicine on hand to last through weekends, holidays, or vacations. You may want to carry an extra written prescription in your billfold or purse in case of an emergency. You can then have it filled if you run out of medicine while you are away from home.

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**Remember**

The goal of beta-blocker therapy for patients with heart failure is to provide the *long-term benefits of a longer life.* Beta-blockers are not used as a quick treatment to improve the symptoms of heart failure.
Tips for taking this medicine.

1. Take this medicine at the same time each day. Taking your medicine before or after you perform another daily routine, such as bathing in the morning or brushing your teeth at bedtime, may help you remember when to take your medicine.

2. If you forget a dose of medicine, take it as soon as you remember on the same day. However, if it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your regular schedule. Do not double dose.

3. Make sure you have enough medication on hand to last through weekends, holidays, or vacations.

4. Some prescribed and over-the-counter medications may interact with this medicine. Make sure all your doctors know what prescription and non-prescription medicines you are taking.

5. Be sure to inform your doctor or dentist of your medications before any surgery.

6. Keep a journal of your symptoms to keep track of changes in your condition and bring it with you to your doctor’s office.

7. Tell your doctor if you currently have or you develop any allergies or other medical problems.

8. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, become pregnant, or are nursing while taking this or any other medication.

9. If you have any problems with this medicine, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.