

# Beta-blockers to treat heart failure

## Information for Patients

**Beta-blockers is the name given to a group of medicines. The name of your beta-blocker is**

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### ***Why has my doctor given me a beta-blocker?***

Beta-blockers can be used to treat a weak heart (known as heart failure), but they also have other uses too. A recent development has shown that beta-blockers can be used to treat heart failure and are now prescribed for this condition under the supervision of a heart specialist. However, they are not new drugs.

Check with your doctor if you are still not sure why you need a beta-blocker.

### ***How do they work?***

Beta-blockers reduce the amount of work the heart has to do by slowing the heart rate and relaxing blood vessels. A small dose is usually given initially and then gradually increased. This treatment is usually started under specialist supervision.

### ***How should I take my beta-blocker?***

Always follow the instructions on the label. Do not stop taking this medicine unless your doctor tells you to stop. For the first few weeks of treatment you may feel worse before you begin to feel better.

### ***What should I do if I miss a dose?***

Take it as soon as you remember. If it is nearly time for the next dose, do not take the one you missed. Take the next dose at the usual time. Do not double up the next dose.

## ***What are the side effects of beta-blockers?***

All drugs have side effects but most people will not experience them. The following can occur in some people:-

- Some beta-blockers can cause or worsen asthma. If you have asthma or become more breathless check with your doctor that it is safe for you to continue taking your beta-blocker.
- Some beta-blockers can cause or worsen cold fingers and toes. If this happens – see your doctor. This is especially important if you have diabetes.
- Some beta-blockers can affect diabetes. If you have diabetes it is important for two reasons that you take extra care to measure your sugar levels:
  - (i) Beta-blockers can make your blood sugar higher than usual.
  - (ii) Beta-blockers can reduce the feelings you get when your sugar levels are too low, so you may not notice the beginning of a low-sugar episode (hypoglycaemic attack).

Other side effects include fatigue, difficulty sleeping and, rarely, male impotence. If you notice any of these problems, discuss them with your doctor.

## ***Can I take other medicines while taking beta-blockers?***

Yes, but some other medicines may affect how beta-blockers work. It is important that you check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicines including ones that you buy over the counter.

This leaflet is not intended as a substitute for any advice that your doctor, nurse or pharmacist may give you.

More detailed information can be obtained from the manufacturers information leaflet.

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