Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme (ACE) Inhibitors

Examples:

- Ramipril (Altace)
- Enalapril (Vasotec)
- Lisinopril (Zestril, Prinivil)
- Captopril (Capoten)
- Trandolapril (Mavik)

What do they do?:

ACE inhibitors have been well studied in patients with heart failure and found to prolong survival, decrease hospitalizations and improve symptoms and exercise tolerance. These benefits are associated with "target doses" for these medications. Your physician will start you at a low dose of an ACE inhibitor and slowly increase the dose over time towards these "target doses". Improvement in symptoms/exercise may take several weeks or months to occur, if at all. However, even if your symptoms do not improve, you should continue to take your medication because of proven survival prolongation.

How do they work?:

ACE inhibitors block the effects of harmful hormones in the body which tighten blood vessels, increase the workload of the heart, and cause progressive worsening of heart function.

What are their common side effects?:

Low blood pressure – ACE inhibitors have a blood pressure lowering effect. When you first start the drug or your dose is increased, you may feel some lightheadedness or dizziness for the first few days, but this should go away with time. You can reduce symptoms by taking your heart failure medications at different times of the day. If you feel dizzy/lightheaded when getting out of bed, sit at the edge of the bed for a few minutes until the symptoms go away and then try standing up. Contact your physician if you are dizzy for more than 5-10 minutes after you stand up, or are so dizzy that you can not walk, or if you have fainted. Do not stop taking your ACE inhibitor without first speaking with your physician.

Dry cough – ACE inhibitors can cause a dry cough that may be bothersome, but otherwise is not harmful. If you find this cough bothersome, your physician may decide to change to your medication. Please keep in my mind that a dry cough can be due to other reasons, such as uncontrolled heart failure.

Kidney and potassium abnormalities – These abnormalities are detected with blood tests. Your physician will be monitoring for these abnormalities.