

Beta Blockers

Examples:

- Carvedilol (Coreg)
- Bisoprolol (Monacor)

What do they do?:

Beta blockers 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 a beta blocker and slowly increase the dose over time towards these “target doses”. Improvement in symptoms/exercise may take several 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?:

Beta blockers block the effects of harmful hormones in the body which speed up heart rate, increase the workload of the heart, and cause progressive worsening of heart function.

What are their common side effects?:

Low blood pressure – Beta blockers 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.

Fluid overload – When you first start a beta blocker or your dose is increased, you may experience a temporary worsening of fluid overload/symptoms. Your physician may need to increase the dose of your diuretic during this period in order to eliminate the excess fluid. Contact your physician if your weight increases by at least 2 pounds over 1 day or by at least 5 pounds over a week, or if you notice worsening shortness of breath or ankle/leg swelling. Do not stop taking your beta blocker without speaking to your physician first.