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Beta blockers

Beta blockers treat high blood pressure and other conditions, such as heart problems. Learn why you might need them and their possible side effects.

By [Mayo Clinic Staff](#)

Beta blockers, also known as beta-adrenergic blocking agents, are medications that reduce your blood pressure. Beta blockers work by blocking the effects of the hormone epinephrine, also known as adrenaline.

Beta blockers cause your heart to beat more slowly and with less force, which lowers blood pressure. Beta blockers also help open up your veins and arteries to improve blood flow.

Examples of beta blockers

Some beta blockers mainly affect your heart, while others affect both your heart and your blood vessels. Your doctor will choose which beta blocker is best for you based on your health conditions.

Examples of beta blockers taken by mouth include:

- Acebutolol (Sectral)
- Atenolol (Tenormin)

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- Bisoprolol (Zebeta)
- Metoprolol (Lopressor, Toprol XL)
- Nadolol (Corgard)
- Nebivolol (Bystolic)
- Propranolol (Inderal, InnoPran XL)

When beta blockers are used

Beta blockers aren't recommended as a first treatment if you have only high blood pressure. Beta blockers aren't usually prescribed for high blood pressure unless other medications, such as diuretics, haven't worked effectively. Also, your doctor may prescribe a beta blocker as one of several medications to lower your blood pressure.

Beta blockers may not work as effectively for black people and older people, especially when taken without other blood pressure medications.

Beta blockers are used to prevent, treat or improve symptoms in people who have:

- Irregular heart rhythm (arrhythmia)
- Heart failure
- Chest pain (angina)
- Heart attacks
- Migraine
- Certain types of tremors

Your doctor may prescribe beta blockers along with other medications.

Side effects

Common side effects of beta blockers can include:

- Cold hands or feet
- Fatigue
- Weight gain

Less common side effects include:

- Depression
- Shortness of breath
- Trouble sleeping

Beta blockers generally aren't used in people with asthma because of concerns that the medication may trigger severe asthma attacks.

In people who have diabetes, beta blockers may block signs of

low blood sugar, such as rapid heartbeat. It's important to check your blood sugar regularly if you have diabetes and you're taking a beta blocker.

Beta blockers can also affect your cholesterol and triglyceride levels. They can cause a slight rise in triglycerides, a type of fat in your blood, and a modest decrease in "good" cholesterol, or high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol. These changes often are temporary.

You shouldn't abruptly stop taking a beta blocker because doing so could increase your risk of a heart attack or other heart problem.

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