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▶ YOUR HEALTHIEST LIFE WITH HEART FAILURE

5 Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Heart Failure Medication

Medications are the cornerstone of treatment for congestive heart failure (CHF). “They’re the key to controlling symptoms and decreasing the excessive work your heart has to do,” says C. Michael White, Pharm.D., distinguished professor of pharmacy practice at the University of Connecticut School of Pharmacy.

But juggling multiple doses can be stressful — and expensive. Fifty-five percent of CHF patients leave the hospital with 10 or



more medications. It can be overwhelming, but your doctor is there to help. Start by asking these five questions.

How will this medication help me? Each medication for heart failure plays an important role in easing your heart’s workload. It may be tempting to take only one or two of your drugs, but White says that “each drug does something a bit dif-

ferent and they’re better together than they are alone.” Understanding what each one does can help empower you to take them as directed with confidence.

Are there ways to simplify my dosing schedule? Combination drugs may be an option. That’s when two medications are combined into one pill. “If you’re taking eight pills a *(Continued)*

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day and it's getting really complicated, combination drugs can help," says White.

But there are drawbacks. "Sometimes it's cheaper to use generic versions of two drugs individually than a brand-name combination. Check with your doctor or pharmacist."



Is there a less expensive option? High costs can put a strain on your budget, but there are lots of ways to save. Your doctor or pharmacist may have recommendations. Here are a couple of things to ask about:

Go generic. Ask your doctor if generic versions of your drugs are right for you. When they're approved by the FDA as "bioequivalents,"

generics have the same active ingredients as brand-name versions, says White. So they're safe and effective, and they may cost up to 85% less because the generic manufacturer doesn't have to repeat research studies.

Shop around. Prices vary widely. A study in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that three popular heart failure medications ranged from \$12 to almost \$400 for a 30-day supply. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about money-saving options like coupon programs, or look into mail-order prescription services.

Which side effects should I expect (and what can I do about them)? Side effects can happen. "From some medications, you may have tiredness; with others, dizziness," says White. "Some can give you a dry, nagging cough, while others worsen sex-

ual dysfunction." But most aren't serious.

"They're often manageable by switching to another drug, reducing the dose, or taking it at a different time," White says. "Your pharmacist can offer tips to make the drugs more tolerable."

Research shows that having the pharmacist involved has a significant positive impact. Most important, never stop your medication on your own. Talk to your doctor first. "Stopping suddenly can increase risk of hospitalization," warns White.

Will this medication cure my heart failure? For most people, heart failure won't go away — and medications aren't a cure. But they're very important: "They'll help improve your symptoms, make the disease progress more slowly, and even help you live longer," says White.

We're Here for You

Your Case Manager can connect you to the resources you need. Just call **1-833-609-0735**.



Healthy Eating Made Simple

Elizabeth Ferrer, R.D., AvMed's Registered Dietitian, shares her favorite tips for happier, healthier meals — without feeling deprived.

Plan a few meals (get the family involved!) and build a grocery list from there. And don't forget to restock staples. I like to take a photo of my pantry and fridge to remind me of what I need. Or, keep a running list on the fridge that everyone can add to as things run out.

Don't be brand loyal.

Prices can vary from brand to brand. Compare prices and try different brands when they're on sale or if you have a coupon. Try store brands too. They're almost always less expensive, and the quality is just as good.

Keep it simple. It's a myth that eating healthy is more costly. It's not about elaborate meals and exotic superfoods. Focus on

basic ingredients and simple recipes. Practice habits like repurposing foods — leftovers are a great way to stretch the budget — and get the family involved in planning and cooking. Eating well doesn't mean going broke.

Be a Super Shopper!

Healthy, delicious food on a budget? Yes, you can! Elizabeth Ferrer, R.D., AvMed's registered dietitian, shows you five simple ways to conquer the checkout line and be a star in the kitchen.

Protein for pennies.

Protein is important, but it doesn't have to come from the meat counter. Beans, peas, and chickpeas are inexpensive plant-based options. A pound of dry lentils costs only a couple of dollars and can make a large pot of lentil soup. With a salad on the side, you've got a low-cost, high-protein (and delicious) meal.

Do a deep freeze.

Fresh produce can be expensive and goes bad

so quickly. Instead, head to the freezer aisle. Frozen fruits and vegetables have the same nutritional value as fresh. (But check labels and avoid added salt, sugar, and sauces.) Keep



frozen veggies on hand to add to pastas, soups, stir fry, or even convenience foods like mac and cheese for a health boost.

Make a list. Knowing exactly what you need when you go to the store can save time and money.

Recipe



Cantaloupe, Cucumber, and Jicama Salsa

Serves 8 / Serving size: ½ cup
Prep time: 20 minutes

Sweet and savory with a cool crunch, this budget-friendly salsa is great on tacos or with grilled fish or chicken.

Ingredients

- 1 cup finely chopped cantaloupe
- 1 cucumber, chopped
- 1 medium jicama (or 2 tart apples), peeled and chopped
- 2 green onions, finely chopped
- Juice of 1 lime
- ¼ tsp. chili powder (optional)

Directions

In a large bowl, gently mix together all ingredients. Let sit 10 minutes at room temperature to allow flavors to marry.

Handy Hint: New to jicama? Nicknamed the “Mexican potato,” this nutritious root veggie is juicy and crunchy, like an apple, with a mildly sweet flavor.

Calories: 45
Fat: 0 g (0 g sat. fat)
Carbs: 11 g (4 g fiber)
Protein: 1 g
Sodium: 10 mg