



Diuretics

Congestive Heart Failure Education Series

Diuretics are medicines that act in the kidneys to help get rid of sodium and water. Normally the kidneys maintain a balance between the amount of sodium and water coming into the body and the amount going out. Heart failure causes less blood to flow to the kidneys. This makes it harder for the kidneys to do their job.

Sodium and water build up, forcing the heart to work harder. Fluid may back up into the lungs and body tissues. Symptoms result, including shortness of breath, fatigue, and swelling of the ankles.

What a Diuretic Does

A diuretic helps the kidneys get rid of the extra sodium and water. This reduces the work of the heart and reduces fluid buildup in the lungs and tissues. Some heart failure patients may build up as much as 10 or even 20 pounds of extra fluid. Most patients notice a large weight loss when they begin taking a diuretic. Symptoms also improve.

How It's Used

Diuretics are generally given once a day, but some patients whose kidneys work poorly may need to take the diuretic two or three times a day. There are numerous diuretics available. Some common ones are: Lasix® (furosemide), Hygroton® (chlorthalidone), Esidrix® (hydrochlorothiazide), and Lozol® (indapamide).

Side Effects

Diuretics normally cause few side effects. Some patients feel dizzy or weak if too much fluid is lost. A few patients have muscle cramps or weakness because the body loses potassium along with sodium and water. Your doctor may prescribe potassium pills or a type of diuretic that prevents potassium loss, such as Dyazide® (hydrochlorothiazide).

If you notice irregular heartbeats, nausea, muscle weakness, or cramps while you are taking a diuretic, be sure to tell your doctor. He or she may wish to adjust the dosage or change the type of diuretic you take.

Benefits

Diuretics are very useful for clearing extra fluid from the body. Most patients notice that their symptoms improve right away. There is less shortness of breath and fatigue, ankle swelling disappears, and energy levels increase.



Tips for Taking This Medicine

Discuss possible problems with your doctor. For example:

- ✓ If you must take your diuretic twice a day, try to work out a schedule so you can avoid getting up during the night to use the bathroom. Times of doses are usually flexible.
- ✓ If you forget a dose, you should take your diuretic as soon as you remember, but you should not take a double dose to make up for one you forgot.
- ✓ If your shortness of breath becomes worse, be sure to tell your doctor. You may need a different diuretic or a different dose.

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