

# Cardiac Glycoside

**digoxin** (Lanoxin<sup>®</sup>, Toloxin<sup>®</sup>)

## Pharmacy Services

This is intended as a general reference.

It does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.

## What is digoxin?

Digoxin (say *dih-jox-in*) works by slowing down the heart rate and making your heart beat more strongly. Together, this improves the heart's pump action, making it easier to pump blood around your body.

## What is digoxin used for?

We use digoxin to control heart problems such as:

- irregular heartbeats (arrhythmias)
- heart failure

In people with irregular heartbeats such as atrial fibrillation, digoxin is used to control the heart rate, keeping it from beating too fast.

In people with heart failure, digoxin helps the heart pump with greater force, making it easier to pump blood, oxygen, and nutrients around the body.

## Why should I take this medication?

For **atrial fibrillation**, digoxin can help the heart work better and reduces the symptoms by slowing the heart rate down. The rapid, irregular contractions of the heart can weaken the heart muscle, making it harder for the heart to pump well.

For **heart failure**, digoxin strengthens the pumping action of the heart which helps these ways:

- The person feels less tired and less short of breath.
- The person has less swelling of the feet and ankles.
- It reduces the chances of needing urgent medical care in hospital for heart problems.

## What should I expect?

It can take a few weeks for digoxin to start working. You might not feel better right away. You should notice your symptoms improve after a few weeks.

It might make you feel dizzy or lightheaded but this should improve over time. When getting up from sitting or lying positions, move slowly to limit these effects.

You might be sent for a blood test to check the level of digoxin in your blood, especially when you first start taking it.

You might need to take this medicine long term, even for the rest of your life, and take it with other medicines to manage your heart condition.

## How do I take digoxin?

Take digoxin exactly as prescribed.

- Take it at the same time each day.
- Take it water, with or without food.
- Never take extra tablets.
- Do **not** stop taking this medication or adjust your dose without first talking to your pharmacist or doctor.

Should you do miss a dose:

- If you remember within 12 hours of the missed dose, take it as soon as you remember.
- If you remember beyond 12 hours of the missed dose, do not take the missed dose. Wait and take the next dose as scheduled. **Do not** double the dose to make up for the missed dose.

## What should I watch for?

Common side effects to watch include any of these:

- little or no appetite
- heartbeat less than 50 beats a minute along with feeling weak, dizzy, or lightheaded
- feeling or being sick to your stomach (nausea or vomiting)
- diarrhea
- feeling confused, seeing things not there, or acting unusually
- sudden changes in your vision where everything is blurry or looks green or yellow, or you see “halos” around lights

**Get medical care right away** if any of these side effects do not go away or get worse. You might have too much digoxin in your body.



## Other helpful points:

A number of substances can interact or interfere with digoxin.

Examples:	black licorice	many prescription
	St. John's Wort	medicines
	herbal medicines	oatmeal, milk, and high-
	Chinese medicines	fibre foods and cereals in
		large amounts

Check with your pharmacist or doctor before starting new medicines or supplements, including herbal medicines, and alternative and natural products.