

Diuretics

What should I watch for?

Diuretics are usually well tolerated. Some side effects to watch for include:

- Feeling lightheaded or dizzy
- Fatigue
- Muscle cramps
- Increase in urination
- Changes in hearing (very rare)

If any side effects become bothersome, contact your pharmacist or doctor for advice.

- You may require periodic blood tests to make sure your sodium, potassium, and other electrolytes remain normal

If you notice an increase in shortness of breath, difficulty lying flat, or swelling in the arms and feet, or a rapid change in your weight, call your doctor—as you may require an adjustment in your diuretic dose.

Other helpful points:

Some drugs may interact with this medication. Check with your pharmacist or health care provider before starting new medications or supplements. This includes non-prescription drugs as well as herbal, alternative and natural products.

Some medication should not be taken during pregnancy. Tell your doctor if you are or plan to become pregnant.

The information is intended only for the person to whom it was provided. The information contained in this publication is designed to be a general reference for your medication. While care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information as of the date of publication, it is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace the specific recommendations of a health care professional, nor is it intended to act as a substitute for any prescribed treatment. The Fraser Health Authority is not responsible for any problems that may arise from the use or misuse of the information provided in this publication. © June 2012

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Metolazone (Zaroxolyn[®])
Hydrochlorothiazide (Hydrodiuril[®])
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Diuretics

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What are diuretics used for?

- Get rid of excess fluid
- Improve symptoms of heart failure
- Treat high blood pressure

If you have heart failure, your heart may not pump blood around the body as well as it normally would. This may lead to accumulation of fluid in the lungs (causing shortness of breath) and tissues (causing swelling of legs, hands, and belly). Diuretics (“water pills”) prevent this accumulation of fluid by increasing the amount of salt and water your kidneys remove.

Some diuretics are also used to treat high blood pressure.

Why should I take this medication?

Accumulation of fluid in the lungs may lead to shortness of breath, especially when doing physical activity or when lying down. Taking a diuretic may reduce the workload on the heart, helping it to pump better. This may help to treat or prevent these symptoms.

In people with high blood pressure, some diuretics (hydrochlorothiazide, chlorthalidone) may reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke, and death.

How do diuretics work?

Diuretics work by interfering with the transport of salt and water across certain cells in the kidneys. This leads to more urine production and reduces fluid that has accumulated in the tissues (for example: lungs, legs, and feet). This should reduce symptoms such as edema and shortness of breath.

What should I expect?

You should notice an improvement in your breathing and a decrease in the swelling of your hands or feet within a few days of starting the diuretic or increasing the dose. When you are on a maintenance dose, you may not notice any changes in your symptoms on a daily basis—but if you were to stop taking the diuretic, your symptoms may return. Diuretics may be taken on a daily basis or on an as needed basis, but this will depend on several factors (heart function, optimization of other medication, stability of symptoms).

How do I take diuretics?

You may find that you have to go to the bathroom more frequently within the few hours after taking the medication, so it is best to take in the morning. Your dose may change several times before finding the dose that works for you.

It is best to take the medication at the same time each day to avoid missing a dose. If you do miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If you remember the next day or close to the time of your next dose just take your next scheduled dose. Do not double the dose to make up for the missed dose.

Do not stop taking this medication or adjust your dose without talking to your health care provider.