

Treating High Blood Pressure: Is a Beta-blocker Drug Right for You?

What are beta-blockers?

Beta-blockers are a group of drugs that are used to treat high blood pressure. They are also used to treat chest pain (angina), abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmia), blocked arteries in the heart (coronary arteries), and heart failure (a condition when the heart muscle gets weaker and cannot pump blood as well).

Why is it important to control high blood pressure?

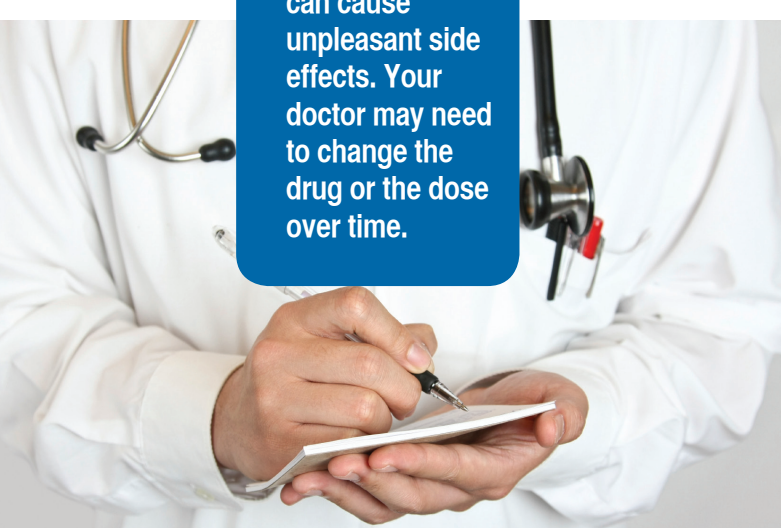
High blood pressure is a leading cause of death. Millions of Americans do not know they have it. It can be hard to keep under control, and it causes more heart attacks and strokes than any other condition. It also raises your risk of heart failure, dementia, and kidney failure.

How do beta-blockers help?

Beta-blockers help to lower blood pressure by making the heart beat more slowly. They can be used alone, but often they are used along with other drugs, such as diuretics, ACE inhibitors, calcium-channel blockers, and ARBs. Many people need two or more drugs to bring their blood pressure down to a normal level.

What are the side effects of beta-blockers?

The side effects of beta-blockers can include bad dreams, cold hands and feet, drowsiness, tiredness, mild depression, and lowered sex drive and sexual impotence.



Beta-blockers can cause unpleasant side effects. Your doctor may need to change the drug or the dose over time.

Some people who start a beta-blocker stop because they do not like the side effects. Talk to your doctor about starting with a low dose and then adjusting it as needed. You may have to try more than one beta-blocker to find the one that works best for you. And you may need to change the drug and the dose over time.






Our advice:

If you are diagnosed with high blood pressure or another heart problem, talk with your doctor about which drugs are right for you.

If your blood pressure is slightly above normal, making lifestyle changes may be enough. These include exercising, controlling your weight, eating healthier foods, limiting alcohol, and stopping smoking. You may also need to take a diuretic (such as generic hydrochlorothiazide or chlorthalidone).

If you have high blood pressure and you have angina or heart failure, or you have already had a heart attack, your doctor may prescribe a beta-blocker.

We compared the cost and safety of beta-blockers. We also compared how well they work to lower blood pressure and help angina and heart failure. We chose these as **Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs**. All are available as generics.


-  As a second drug for high blood pressure—*atenolol, metoprolol tartrate, nadolol, or propranolol*
-  For treating angina—*atenolol, metoprolol tartrate, nadolol, or propranolol*
-  After a heart attack—*atenolol, metoprolol tartrate, or propranolol*
-  For mild heart failure—*bisoprolol, carvedilol, or metoprolol succinate*
-  For severe heart failure—*carvedilol*

The chart on the next page can help you learn more and compare costs.

Beta-blockers: Drug Comparison Chart*

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs are in blue. We recommend these drugs because they work as well and are as safe as the other drugs, and they cost less. The dollar symbol **\$** means the dose of that drug may be available for a low monthly cost through programs offered by large chain stores, like Costco, CVS, Kmart, Kroger, Sam's Club, Target, Walmart, and Walgreens. Some of these stores have restrictions or charge a membership fee, however.

Our analysis is based on a scientific review by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. This is a summary of a longer, more detailed report you can find at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

Best Buy	Generic Name & Strength	Brand Name ^A	Pills per Day ^B	Average Cost per Month ^C	Recommended Use
	Atenolol 25 mg tablet	Generic	One	\$6 	Angina, heart attack, second drug for high blood pressure
	Atenolol 25 mg tablet	Tenormin	One	\$62	
	Atenolol 50 mg tablet	Tenormin	Two	\$122	
	Bisoprolol 10 mg tablet	Generic	One	\$36	Mild heart failure
	Bisoprolol 10 mg tablet	Zebeta	One	\$112	
	Carvedilol 6.25 mg tablet	Generic	Two	\$49 	Mild and severe heart failure
	Carvedilol 6.25 mg tablet	Coreg	Two	\$161	
	Labetalol 200 mg tablet	Generic	Two	\$28 	
	Labetalol 200 mg tablet	Trandate	Two	\$78	
	Metoprolol succinate SR^D 50 mg tablet	Generic	One	\$32 	Mild heart failure
	Metoprolol succinate SR 50 mg tablet	Toprol XL	One	\$47	
	Metoprolol tartrate 50 mg tablet	Generic	One	\$4 	Angina, heart attack, second drug for high blood pressure
	Metoprolol tartrate 50 mg tablet	Lopressor	One	\$62	
	Nadolol 40 mg tablet	Generic	One	\$10 	Angina, second drug for high blood pressure
	Nadolol 40 mg tablet	Corgard	One	\$108	
	Propranolol 20 mg tablet	Generic	Two	\$8 	Angina, heart attack, second drug for high blood pressure
	Propranolol SR 80 mg capsule	Generic	One	\$44	
	Propranolol SR 80 mg capsule	Inderal LA	One	\$168	
	Timolol 10 mg tablet	Generic	Two	\$33	

* Due to space limitations, this chart does not list all beta-blockers. For a more complete list, see the full report at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org.

A "Generic" indicates that this drug is sold under its generic name.

B Depending on your health conditions, symptoms, and response to the medicine, your doctor may adjust your dose to be either higher or lower than what is stated in this price chart.

C Prices are based on nationwide average retail prices for January 2011. *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* obtained prices from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Pharma Solutions, which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.

D "SR" stands for sustained release.

This series is produced by Consumer Reports and *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*, a public information project supported by grants from the state Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin. This brief should not be viewed as a substitute for a consultation with a medical or health professional. It is provided to enhance communication with your doctor, not replace it.