



Our Recommendations

Beta-blockers are used by tens of millions of Americans every day to treat high blood pressure and heart conditions including angina, coronary artery disease, heart attack, and heart failure. There are 14 prescription medicines in this class. Generic versions of all but two are now available, costing as little as \$10 to \$15 a month. (See page 2.)

To help you and your doctor choose which beta-blocker is best and most cost-effective for you, *Consumer Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and price. This two-page brief is a summary of an 18-page report you can access on the Internet at www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org. You can also learn about other drugs we've analyzed on this free Web site. Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. Grants from the Engelberg Foundation and National Library of Medicine help fund *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*.

DO YOU NEED A BETA-BLOCKER?

Beta-blockers are one of several kinds of drugs used to treat high blood pressure and heart disease. They are not the first choice for most people who have high blood pressure but no other heart ailment. Low-cost diuretics (often called water pills) are a better initial choice in that case. However, beta-blockers are the first choice of many doctors for people who have high blood pressure and/or one or more of the following conditions: angina (chest pain due to coronary artery disease), a high heart rate, certain abnormal heart rhythms, heart failure (when the heart muscle weakens), and if you've had a previous heart attack. The table below gives you general guidance on blood pressure levels and treatment.

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For most people who need a beta-blocker, several low-cost generics are the best choices. They are proven, life-saving medicines with more than 25 years of widespread use and could save you \$1,000 to \$2,000 a year over brand-name beta-blockers.

Choosing a beta-blocker depends on what you need it for. Studies have shown that certain beta-blockers are more effective and safer than others for certain conditions. Taking effectiveness, safety, and cost into account, we have selected the following beta-blockers as *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs*:

- For high blood pressure—metoprolol tartrate, nadolol, and propranolol.
- For angina—atenolol, metoprolol tartrate, nadolol, and propranolol.
- After a heart attack—atenolol, metoprolol tartrate, and propranolol.
- For mild heart failure—bisoprolol and metoprolol succinate (Toprol XL).
- For severe heart failure—carvedilol (Coreg).

All but two—metoprolol succinate (Toprol XL) and carvedilol (Coreg)—of these medicines are low-cost generics. All have been proven to be either just as effective or superior to other beta-blockers. Toprol XL is a relatively low-cost, brand-name drug. Coreg is a more expensive, recently approved brand-name drug.

People respond to the various beta-blockers differently. You may have to try more than one.

Beta-blockers are generally safe medicines. But they can cause some annoying side effects, most notably fatigue, drowsiness, or lightheadedness. They can also cause—less commonly—breathing difficulty, lowered sex drive, erectile dysfunction, and mild feelings of depression. You can often minimize these side effects by taking the lowest dose that works for you.

Blood Pressure Levels and Treatment Guidance

Blood Pressure Classification	Systolic Measure (mm Hg)	Diastolic Measure (mm Hg)	General Treatment Guidance
Normal	Below 120	Below 80	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No treatment needed • Healthy lifestyle encouraged to maintain normal blood pressure
Prehypertensive	120-139	80-89	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifestyle changes needed: weight loss, quitting smoking, low-salt and low-fat diet, moderate alcohol use, and increased exercise • Drug treatment not indicated except if you have diabetes, kidney, or heart disease
Stage 1 High Blood Pressure	140-159	90-99	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifestyle changes urged, same as above • Drug treatment needed. Doctor may start with one medicine to see if it does the job.
Stage 2 High Blood Pressure	160 or above	100 or above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifestyle changes urged, same as above • Drug treatment needed. Two or more medicines usually required to bring blood pressure down.

Beta-Blocker Cost Comparison and Best Buy Indication – Examples¹

	Generic Name and Dose	Brand Name (s) ²	Frequency of Use	Monthly Cost ³	Best Buy Indication
	Acebutolol 200mg	Sectral	Two a day	\$174	
	Acebutolol 200mg	Generic	Two a day	\$43	
	Atenolol 25mg	Tenormin	One a day	\$47	
CR BEST BUY	Atenolol 25mg	Generic	One a day	\$10	Angina, Heart Attack
	Atenolol 50mg	Tenormin	One a day	\$47	
CR BEST BUY	Atenolol 50mg	Generic	One a day	\$10	Angina, Heart Attack
	Betaxolol 10mg	Kerlone	One a day	\$41	
	Betaxolol 10mg	Generic	One a day	\$30	
	Bisoprolol 10mg	Zebeta	One a day	\$55	
CR BEST BUY	Bisoprolol 10mg	Generic	One a day	\$38	Mild to Moderate Heart Failure
CR BEST BUY	Carvedilol 12.5mg	Coreg	Two a day	\$124	Severe Heart Failure
	Labetalol 100mg	Normodyne	Two a day	\$38	
	Labetalol 100mg	Generic	Two a day	\$26	
	Metoprolol tartrate 50mg	Lopressor	One a day	\$35	
CR BEST BUY	Metoprolol tartrate 25mg or 50mg	Generic	One a day ⁴	\$9	High Blood Pressure, Angina, Heart Attack
CR BEST BUY	Metoprolol succinate (sustained release) 25mg or 50mg	Toprol XL	One a day	\$32	Mild to Moderate Heart Failure
	Nadolol 20mg	Corgard	One a day	\$59	
CR BEST BUY	Nadolol 20mg	Generic	One a day	\$18	High Blood Pressure, Angina
	Penbutolol 20mg	Levadol	One a day	\$61	
	Pindolol 10mg	Visken	Two a day	\$94	
	Pindolol 10mg	Generic	Two a day	\$43	
	Propranolol 20mg	Inderal	Two a day	\$44	
CR BEST BUY	Propranolol 20mg	Generic	Two a day	\$13	High Blood Pressure, Angina, Heart Attack
	Propranolol 40mg	Inderal	Two a day	\$56	
CR BEST BUY	Propranolol 40mg	Generic	Two a day	\$15	High Blood Pressure, Angina, Heart Attack
	Timolol 20mg	Blocadren	Two a day	\$72	
	Timolol 20mg	Generic	Two a day	\$45	

UNDERSTANDING GENERICS: A generic drug is one that is sold under its generic name. For example, in this table, for the first drug listed, acebutolol is the generic or chemical name and Sectral is the brand name. Generic copies of brand-name drugs have the same active ingredient. In column two, when the word “generic” appears, the price given is for the generic version.

(1) For the complete list of beta-blockers at various doses and their prices, go to www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org to download the full 18-page beta-blocker report.

(2) “Generic” indicates that this drug is sold by its generic name.

(3) Prices reflect nationwide retail average for December 2004, rounded to the nearest dollar; data provided by NDCHealth, a health-care information company.

(4) Twice a day dosing is common for people with angina or who have had a heart attack.