EquaHeart

Heart medications (cardiovascular drugs)

Taken as prescribed, heart medications lower the risk of heart attack and stroke.

1 Common medication classes

Name endings can help you recognize them

CLASS	EXAMPLES	PURPOSE	KEY POINTS
Antiplatelets	ASA (Aspirin), clopidogrel, ticagrelor	Prevent blood clots, including in stents	With a stent, **never stop** without consulting your cardiologist
Anticoagulants	apixaban, rivaroxaban, edoxaban **-xaban**, warfarin	Blood thinners; prevent clots and stroke	Report unusual bleeding or black stools
Statins	atorvastatin, rosuvastatin **-statin**	Lower LDL cholesterol; slow plaque	Report persistent muscle pain
Beta-blockers	metoprolol, bisoprolol **-olol**, carvedilol	Slow the heart rate and lower blood pressure	Do not stop suddenly. May cause fatigue or cold hands
ACE inhibitors	ramipril, perindopril **-pril**	Lower blood pressure; protect the heart and kidneys	A dry cough is common; report it
ARBs and ARNI	candesartan, valsartan **-sartan**; sacubitril/valsartan	Lower blood pressure; treat heart failure	May cause dizziness; rise slowly
SGLT2 inhibitors	empagliflozin, dapagliflozin **-gliflozin**	Benefit heart failure, kidney disease and diabetes	Ask what to do on days you are ill and cannot eat or drink
Diuretics	furosemide, hydrochlorothiazide, indapamide	"Water pills" that remove excess fluid	Increase urination; ask about timing
Nitroglycerin	spray, tablet or patch	Relieves or prevents angina	Never combine with erectile dysfunction drugs such as sildenafil or tadalafil

2 Taking medications safely

- Take them at the **same time each day**; a pill organizer can help.
- If you miss a dose, take it unless the next one is due soon. **Never take a double dose.**
- Consult your pharmacist before using **over-the-counter, herbal or supplement** products.
- Inform your dentist and surgeon of all your medications before any procedure.
- **Do not stop** any heart medication without consulting your care team, even if you feel well.
- Avoid **ibuprofen and naproxen**; ask your pharmacist about safer pain relief.
- Some statins and blood pressure medications interact with **grapefruit**; ask whether yours do.
- Ask before using **salt substitutes** or potassium supplements.

3 Keep a medication list



Include over-the-counter products and supplements; bring it to every appointment.

4 Questions to ask

- What is it for, and for how long?
- Which side effects should I report?
- Does it interact with other medications or foods?
- What if I am ill or need surgery?

911

Seek emergency care for persistent chest pain, fainting, difficulty breathing, facial or throat swelling, or serious bleeding.

Sources: Nova Scotia Health, Common medications after a heart attack: patient and family guide, 2025. Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, Statins (heartandstroke.ca). CCS guidelines on heart failure (2021, 2025) and atrial fibrillation (2020).
This guide is general information. Always follow the instructions from your own doctor and pharmacist.

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