



Diuretics

Diuretics are medicines that are often used to treat high blood pressure. They are sometimes called 'water tablets' because they can cause you to pass more urine than usual.

There are different types of diuretic, but the type most commonly used to treat high blood pressure are called "thiazide" diuretics. Most of these medicines have names that end in "ide". April 2009

How do they work?

Diuretics work on your kidneys by increasing the amount of salt and water that comes out through your urine. Too much salt can cause extra fluid to build up in your blood vessels, raising your blood pressure. Diuretics lower your blood pressure by flushing salt out of your body, taking this unwanted extra fluid with it.

Diuretics also cause the walls of your blood vessel to relax and widen, which making it easier for your blood to flow through. This effect also lowers your blood pressure.

Who might be given a diuretic?

Most people who have high blood pressure will need to take one or more medicines to control it. Thiazide diuretics are a popular first choice medicine for high blood pressure.

They are particularly recommended for people who are over 55 or who are of African Caribbean origin. However, even if neither of these apply to you may be given a thiazide diuretic as a first

Related Information sheets

- ACE inhibitors
- Angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs)
- Calcium-channel blockers (CCBs)

choice. If you need to take more than one medicine to control your blood pressure enough, you may be given an ACE inhibitor as a second or third medicine.

Other types of diuretic, called "loop diuretics" or "potassium-sparing diuretics", may sometimes be given to people who cannot take a thiazide, or to people already taking three blood pressure medicines. Potassium-sparing diuretics may be used in people who have low potassium levels, because other diuretics can cause a drop in potassium levels.

Who would not take a diuretic?

If you are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning a pregnancy, you should not be given an ACE inhibitor.

For more information, please contact:

Blood Pressure UK

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(020) 7882 6255

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Diuretics used in the UK

Medicine name Brand names

Thiazides

Bendroflumethiazide	Aprinox, Bendroflumethiazide, Bendroflumethiazide BP, Prestim
Chlortalidone	Co-Tenidone, Co-Tenidone BP, Hygroton, Tenoret 50, Tenoretic
Cyclopenthiiazide	Navidrex
Indapamide	Coversyl Plus, Natrilix, Natrilix SR
Metolazone	Metenix 5
Xipamide	Diurexan

Loop

Bumetanide	Bumetanide, Burinex
Furosemide	Furosemide, Lasix
Torsemide	Torsemide, Torem

Potassium-sparing

Eplerenone	Inspra
Spironolactone	Idactone, Co-flumactone, Lasilactone, Spironolactone
Triamterene	Frusene, Co-triamterzide, Dyazide, Dytide, Kalspare
Amiloride	Amilamont, Amiloride, Burinex, Co-Amilofruse, Co-amilozide, Frumil, Frumil LS, Moduret 25, Moduretic

Possible side-effects of diuretic include:

- an increased need to go to the toilet
- feeling thirsty, dizzy, weak, lethargic or sick
- low blood pressure when moving from lying or sitting to standing
- muscle cramps
- skin rash
- raised uric acid levels (that can lead to kidney problems and gout)
- raised blood sugar levels
- problems with erections in men (rarely).

Rarely, ACE inhibitors can interfere with other health problems you may have, or with medicines you are taking. For example, if you have urinary problems, gout, severe kidney or liver disease, or Addison's disease (a rare condition affecting the adrenal glands) you should not be given a thiazide diuretic. Your doctor should always consider your overall health and treatment, not just blood pressure treatment, before giving you any new medicine.

Some people who are given a diuretic will need to be monitored closely. These include more elderly people, people with kidney or liver problems, people with diabetes, or people who have low potassium or sodium levels.

Do they have side-effects?

Most people will have no side-effects from their blood pressure medicines. They usually only happen when you start to take a new medicine, or a higher dose of your medicine. If you do experience a side-effect it may lessen over time as

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your body gets used to the medicine. If not, your doctor may change your dosage or your medicine if they feel it is appropriate.

Diuretics can also lower the amount of potassium in your body. This may put you at risk of a condition called hypokalaemia, which can be dangerous to your health. You should have your potassium levels monitored by your doctor or nurse if you are taking a thiazide or loop (but not a potassium-sparing) diuretic.

Other things to be aware of

Many doctors will recommend that you take your diuretic in the morning as it is likely to cause you to produce more urine than normal. This may help you avoid having to get up in the night to go to the toilet.

Some people taking a diuretic may need to have regular blood and urine tests to check potassium and blood sugar levels. This is to make sure that all the chemicals in your bloodstream are properly balanced.

Taking a thiazide diuretic with a beta-blocker can increase your long-term risk of developing diabetes.

About this information sheet

This information sheet was produced by the Information & Support team at the Blood Pressure Association. It is intended for people who have high blood pressure, or who are interested in high blood pressure. For more about how we make our information, go to www.bloodpressureuk.org/AboutUs

If you are taking both these types of medicines together, you may wish to speak to your doctor or pharmacist about whether this is right for you.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicines in combination with your diuretic – this includes over-the-counter treatments.

As with other blood pressure lowering medicines, once you start taking a diuretic, be prepared to stay on it for the long term. Some people stop taking their blood pressure medicines when they think their blood pressure is under control, but doing this can put your health at risk. If you have any concerns about your diuretic, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

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