

Antihypertensive Drugs

Hypertension refers to the prolonged and persistent elevation of blood pressure above the normal range. If not treated properly, hypertension can cause severe complications such as stroke, coronary heart disease and kidney failure.

Patients with hypertension must take antihypertensive drugs on a long-term basis. Although such drugs cannot give a radical cure, they can prevent heart failure, kidney failure and acute stroke induced by hypertension and delay the development of atherosclerosis by controlling the blood pressure. Generally speaking, antihypertensive drugs must be taken for life.

Classification of the Drugs

Antihypertensive drugs that are commonly used can be classified into three categories:

1. Diuretics: They lower blood pressure by increasing urination. Common examples are hydrochlorothiazide and indapamide.
2. Vasodilators: They dilate blood vessels to lower blood pressure. One common example is nifedipine.
3. Other drugs: They achieve an effective control of the level of blood pressure by regulating bodily functions that governs blood pressure. Common examples are metoprolol, propranolol, methyldopa and captopril.

All antihypertensive drugs can only be sold on doctors' prescription in registered dispensaries, and should be taken regularly according to medical instructions.

Side Effects of the Drugs

Side effects of antihypertensive drugs vary with individual drugs. Common side effects include the following temporary reactions:

1. Headache, weakness or fatigue.
2. Dizziness upon rising quickly from a sitting or lying position.
3. Numbness or sharp pain in fingers or toes.
4. Cold hands and feet.

5. Dry eyes, mouth and throat.
6. Nightmares or sleeping difficulties

Do not worry if you have any of these reactions. In most cases, such reactions would gradually subside after the drugs have been taken for some time. Consult a doctor right away if the adverse reactions persist or aggravate.

Advice on Medication

The following should be borne in mind when taking antihypertensive drugs:

1. Learn the name and dosage of the drugs you are taking.
2. Take the drugs regularly as instructed by your doctor in order to have effective control of hypertension. Keep on taking the drugs even if your conditions improve.
3. Do not stop medication without your doctor's instruction. Take your medicines at the same fixed time every day as far as possible. If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible unless it is almost time for the next scheduled dose. In that case, skip the missed dose and take the next dose as directed. Do not take double doses.
4. The drugs should not be taken with alcoholic drinks to avoid dizziness or fainting.
5. If you have to take other drugs as well such as cough syrup, drugs for common cold and anti-cough medicines, you should consult your doctor first to avoid affecting the efficacy of the antihypertensive drugs. You may bring along your medical history or labelled drug bags for your doctor's reference during follow-up consultation.
6. Do not put different drugs in the same bottle. Each drug should be put into its original labelled container.
7. The stock of drugs should be sufficient for several days' use. Do not wait till the last minute to fill the prescription.

Life Adaptations

People with hypertension should take note of the following in their daily lives:

1. Quit smoking.
2. Reduce salt intake. Eat less preserving and processed food such as sausages, pickles and potato chips.
3. Drink less caffeinated beverages like strong tea, coffee and coke.

4. Do moderate exercise regularly.
5. Keep optimal body weight.
6. Learn self-relaxation because anxiety, loss of temper and overstrain all give rise to increased blood pressure.

Storage of the Drugs

The drugs should be stored in a cool and dry place. Generally, they do not need to be refrigerated unless otherwise stated in the drug labels. Also, they should be stored properly to avoid accidents of mistaken consumption by children.