What are beta blockers?
Beta blockers are a type of medication that can help prevent heart attack and stroke in people who are at increased risk. They work by relaxing the heart muscle and slowing down the heart rate. This makes it easier for the heart to pump blood.

If you are at risk for developing heart disease—or if you have already had a heart attack or stroke—your doctor or care team may recommend that you take a beta blocker daily.

Who should take beta blockers?
Beta blockers are used to treat high blood pressure, heart failure, irregular heart rate, blocked arteries, and angina (chest pain).

Beta blockers can also provide special protection and benefits for people with particular conditions.

- If you have coronary artery disease, beta blockers can reduce the risk of sudden death from a heart attack that can occur without symptoms or warning.
- If you have heart failure, beta blockers may be able to help strengthen your heart, reduce your need for hospitalization, and help you live longer.

Beta Blocker Tips
Most people who take this medication have few or no side effects. There are still things you can do to reduce your risk of problems while taking a beta blocker.

Allergies
Do not take a beta blocker if you’ve had an allergic reaction to any type of beta blocker in the past. Tell your doctor if you’ve had any past severe allergic reactions, such as anaphylactic shock.

Asthma
People with well-controlled asthma can usually take a beta blocker without problems. However, in rare cases, the asthma can get worse. Make sure to tell your doctor if your asthma is uncontrolled.

Diabetes
Do your best to check your blood sugar as directed while taking a beta blocker. The medication can make it harder to detect symptoms of low blood sugar.

Other medications
Ask your doctor about how beta blockers might affect the other medications you’re taking. If you’re taking diltiazem (Cardizem, Dilacor), verapamil (Calan, Isoptin), or digoxin, make sure to tell your doctor or care team right away.

Pregnancy
If you’re pregnant or may become pregnant in the near future, let your doctor or care team know.
What problems could I have taking a beta blocker?
Some people develop a very slow heart rate or blood pressure, which can cause lightheadedness.

Take your beta blocker exactly as prescribed to help manage any possible sexual side effects. Talk to your doctor or care team if you're concerned about this.

If you want to stop taking your medication, consult with your doctor first. Be sure to tell your doctor or care team if there are reasons why you cannot take any medication that's prescribed, or if you seem to have trouble remembering to take your medication.

What else should I know about taking beta blockers?
People who take beta blockers often take other medications to help them stay healthy. Medications work best when you also eat healthy, exercise, and manage stress.

Since you may need to take this medication for your whole life, it's important to work with your doctor or care team to ensure your medicine and dose are right for you.

If you believe you cannot afford your medication, financial assistance may be available. Call the Medical Financial Assistance Program at 1-866-399-7696 to learn more.

Don't forget! Let your doctor or care team know if you're taking any herbal supplements or over-the-counter medications. This can help keep you safe.

Common Beta Blockers

- Atenolol (Tenormin)
- Metoprolol (Lopressor, Toprol)

Preferred for People with Heart Failure

- Metoprolol succinate (Toprol XL)
- Carvedilol (Coreg)
- Bisoprolol (Zebeta)

Other resources: Visit kp.org/mydoctor to view most lab results, email your doctor, and check your preventive health reminders.