If you have high blood pressure, also called hypertension, your doctor may prescribe blood pressure medications to help lower it. Most people with high blood pressure need to take 2 or more medications to control their blood pressure. This handout is about one kind of high blood pressure medication called diuretics.

### What is hypertension?

Hypertension means having higher than normal blood pressure. Blood pressure is the force of your blood on the walls of your blood vessels. This force, or pressure, enables blood to pump throughout your body.

Everyone needs a certain amount of pressure to make this process possible. When the force of blood against your artery walls is too strong, you have high blood pressure, or hypertension.

When you have high blood pressure, your heart has to work too hard to send blood throughout your body. By lowering your blood pressure, you can help take this extra demand off your heart and blood vessels.

The top number (119/79) of your blood pressure measurement is called the systolic blood pressure. This is the force of blood against your arteries when your heart is sending blood to your body. The lower number (119/79) is the diastolic blood pressure. This is the force of blood against your arteries while your heart relaxes between beats. Both numbers are important.

### What is a diuretic?

A diuretic (sometimes called a water pill) is a very effective medication for lowering blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure, taking a diuretic every day can help lower your chance of having a heart attack or stroke.

Diuretics work in the kidneys by helping your body get rid of excess water and sodium when you urinate. Diuretics also relax and widen the walls of the arteries.

### Here are the ranges for different levels of blood pressure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you are:</th>
<th>Your blood pressure target is:</th>
<th>What you can do:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An adult 18 to 59 years old</td>
<td>139/89 or below</td>
<td>• Take medications as directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person with diabetes</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Eat less sodium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person with certain types of kidney problems</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Exercise regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An adult 60 years of age or older without diabetes and without certain types of kidney problems</td>
<td>149/89 or below</td>
<td>• Avoid drinking alcohol in excess</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It is common to take other medications in addition to a diuretic to lower your blood pressure. Ask your doctor or other health care professional for more information.

### What problems could I have taking a diuretic?

Most people who take diuretics do not have any side effects or problems. Some people may urinate more frequently. While this frequent urination is typically not a health concern, it may be a nuisance. If frequent urination interferes with your daily activities, talk with your doctor about your options. Many times, once a person adjusts to the medication, the side effects go away.

A few people who take a high dose of a diuretic can have low potassium levels in their body. We all need potassium in our bodies. Most of the time, a low-dose diuretic, which is the dose most commonly prescribed, does not cause a big change in potassium levels. To be

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cautious, your doctor may ask you to have your potassium level checked at the lab. If your potassium is low, you may want to eat more bananas, broccoli, or other high potassium foods. If you’re concerned about low potassium, talk with your doctor. There are other effective blood pressure medications that might work better for you.

If you have dizziness during the first 2 weeks of taking a diuretic, you may want to get up slowly or sit down. If this symptom is bothersome or does not go away, please speak with your doctor.

How can I reduce the risk of having problems taking a diuretic?

• Do not take a diuretic if you are pregnant or may become pregnant in the near future.
• Tell your doctor or other health care professional if you have kidney problems or gout.

When you take any medication, consider the benefits compared with the small chance of experiencing a side effect. Diuretics control blood pressure and lower your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. Talking with your doctor about any side effects can help you and your doctor choose the medicine and dose best for you.

How do diuretics fit into my hypertension treatment?
Diuretics are an important part of treatment. They do not take the place of healthy eating, regular physical activity, and stress management. If you are prescribed a diuretic, it’s important for you to take it as directed. Don’t stop taking your medication without consulting with your doctor or other health care professional first. If you have side effects, your doctor may be able to change your medication or the dosage to prevent them.

Blood pressure medicines are taken long term, so work with your doctor to ensure you are taking the right medicine and dose for you.

What do I need to know about my diuretic?
Take the time to ask your doctor or other health care professional these questions about your medication:

• Why am I taking it?
• How often and for how long should I take it?
• Are there any special instructions for it?
• Are there activities that I should avoid while taking it?
• What kind of side effects could I have and what symptoms should I look for?
• Is there a way to avoid any side effects?

How can I remember to take my medications?
Everyone has struggled with remembering to do things that they don’t regularly do. There are a number of things that can help you remember, such as:

• Set an alarm clock or watch as a reminder.

Other resources

• To find more information about your diuretic go to kp.org, and search our drug encyclopedia.
• Contact your facility’s Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and other resources.
• Some conditions, including hypertension, can be seriously affected by violence or abuse. If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, there is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.
• If you feel you cannot afford your medication, financial assistance may be available. To learn more, talk to your Kaiser Permanente pharmacist or call the Kaiser Permanente Medical Financial Assistance Program (MFAP) at 1-866-399-7696.