

# CHF News: Take It To Heart



A monthly newsletter for REACT study patients

Issue #4

## CHF Medication, Herbals, and New Drugs

By Dr. Tammy Bungard  
Pharmacist and Cardiology Research Fellow  
University of Alberta

In this issue of CHF News: *Take It To Heart*, we discuss the medication used to treat congestive heart failure, some of the herbal products that patients commonly ask about, and a few new medicines which may be of interest to you.

### CHF Medication

As you know, several different types of drugs as well as combinations of medications are prescribed for people with heart failure. All these medications are used to make you feel better, and many of them also reduce the number of times a patient needs to be admitted to hospital. Some medications, such as ACE inhibitors and beta-blockers, have been shown to decrease the risk of death.

In order for you to benefit from your medication, you must continue to take it, exactly as prescribed, for an extended period of time. For additional information about the medication you are taking, refer to your REACT patient information binder.

### Types and Examples of Medications Used to Treat Heart Failure

Type	Example(s): Brand and generic names
Diuretics (water pills)	Lasix (furosemide), Burinex (bumetanide), Hydrodiuril (hydrochlorothiazide), Zaroxolyn (metolazone)
ACE Inhibitors	Capoten (captopril), Vasotec (enalapril), Prinivil or Zestril (lisinopril), Accupril (quinapril)
Beta-blockers	Lopresor (metoprolol), Tenormin (atenolol), Coreg (carvedilol), Sectral (acebutolol)
Inotrope	Lanoxin (digoxin)

### Herbs As Medicine?

You have probably heard about herbal products. Most drug stores have an entire section dedicated to them. Herbals may or may not be helpful for your congestive heart failure. They are different than regular drugs in several ways.

Herbals are of vegetable origin, and typically not chemically formulated. Unlike regular medication, these products are not yet regulated by a licensing body. This means that herbal products may or may not contain the stated amount of active ingredient in each package. In addition, many of the claimed benefits for herbal medicines are not based on properly designed scientific studies.

Despite the fact that many prescription medications (such as digoxin) are derived from plants, they cannot be compared to herbal medicines. Prescription drugs are subjected to many tests to ensure that they contain the necessary amount of active ingredient and that it is of a form that will allow a defined amount of absorption into the body. They must be tested in properly designed scientific studies, involving a large number of people for several years, before they can be sold as prescription medication.

**Ginseng:** Ginseng has been used for centuries. Because the root is in the shape of a man, it was believed to be useful in the treatment of all “man’s afflictions”. Ginseng has been promoted as a cure-all, producing a state of

well-being which resists stress and overcomes disease by strengthening normal bodily functions. There has been only one well designed clinical study of the effects of ginseng on humans and the results showed neither benefit nor harm. Teinchi ginseng (a type of ginseng) has shown favourable effects on coronary disease in small studies using animals. However, until additional studies are conducted, ginseng has no proven benefit for humans. The most commonly reported side effect is insomnia. Diarrhea and skin rash occur less often. The consumer should be aware that there are several different kinds of ginseng. Since there is no production regulation, the amount of ginseng varies from product to product. In fact, some "ginseng products" contain no ginseng at all!

**Garlic:** Garlic is most frequently promoted for the treatment of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and high blood pressure. These beneficial effects have been proven in animals, and to some extent in humans. It is believed that the ability of garlic to provide some protection against atherosclerosis is based on its ability to reduce cholesterol levels and thin the blood. These claims are valid only when large amounts of fresh, raw garlic are consumed on a daily basis: about 5 to 20 cloves per day! The more concentrated garlic products sold in stores have not shown the same benefit. It is believed that the "active ingredient" becomes destroyed during processing of the product. Taking large amounts of raw garlic can cause heartburn and gas problems, not to mention, reduce the number of close acquaintances!

Patients taking warfarin, should know that the large amounts of garlic required to produce the claimed benefits will also have a thinning effect on blood. Therefore, it is not recommended to combine warfarin and large amounts of garlic.

**Echinacea:** It is claimed that echinacea stimulates the body's immune system. Some people take it by mouth to reduce the duration of flu symptoms and the frequency of the common cold. Others apply the product directly on the skin to heal wounds. There is no information about the side effects of echinacea. However, there is always the potential for an allergic reaction, particularly in people sensitive to other members of the daisy family.

**Saw Palmetto:** Saw Palmetto has anti-male sex hormone properties. It is most commonly promoted for the treatment of prostate enlargement. However, since there is no proof that the product works, the United States has banned the sale of Saw Palmetto for the treatment of this condition. There is also no evidence to indicate that Saw Palmetto stimulates sexual vigour. Side effects are rare but may include headache, nausea, and upset stomach.

**Licorice:** Licorice is used as a flavouring agent and to help clear the chest during coughs and colds. People with heart disease should not take the licorice herb because it is quite concentrated and may cause salt and water retention. But there's no worry where candy is concerned; a great deal of licorice candy contains little or no licorice at all!

**Coenzyme Q:** Coenzyme Q is a natural substance found in heart muscle. There is a deficiency of it in people with heart failure. Coenzyme Q assists in the heart muscle's energy production, and thus it was speculated that supplementing the substance would improve the function of the heart muscle. Poorly designed studies, involving only a few people, have claimed improvement in symptoms, patients' quality of life, and the ability of the heart to pump. One better designed study found no such benefits. Therefore, there is no information to support the fact that Coenzyme Q is helpful in the treatment of heart failure.

## New Meds

### Heard about Viagra?

Viagra (the brand name for the drug sildenafil) has been recently introduced for the treatment of sexual impotence (lack of the ability to achieve an erection) in men. Patients who have angina (chest pain) may not be able to take Viagra. Viagra is also not recommended for anyone taking nitrate-containing products (e.g. nitro patch, Isordil). It has been reported that combining Viagra with nitrates seriously reduces blood pressure. If you are considering trying Viagra, speak with your doctor first.



## Are you a smoker? Quitting will reduce your risk of heart disease more than any drug!



Zyban (also known as bupropion) is a drug recently marketed as smoking cessation therapy. As with any other therapy for smoking cessation, you must stop smoking and be motivated to do so because the drug is only part of the solution to the problem. Zyban is usually taken for only 12 weeks. People with heart failure can take Zyban. Zyban is not appropriate for people with a history of seizures, eating disorders, or for those who take certain anti-depressant medications. Side effects reported with Zyban include dry mouth and difficulty sleeping. Ask your doctor if Zyban would be useful to help you stop smoking.

### Healthy Choices

Only you can make the right choices to live a healthier and happier lifestyle. Taking medication proven to be beneficial in studies is a good way to accomplish this goal. Many herbal products do not have proven benefits, and may even be harmful. Any time you have questions about your old or new medication, just ask your doctor or pharmacist!

## HEARTWISE ADVICE

### Get organized!



Anybody who takes medication daily has wondered at one time or another: "Did I take my medication today"? A daily or weekly medication container will let you know. An empty slot means you took your medication for that time of day. A full slot means you did not. These medication containers are designed to help you organize your pills and schedule the time to take them.



## Caution: SALT AHEAD!

Grocery shopping is an exhausting sport. Add a food restriction to the challenge and you can feel quite overwhelmed. By using the following tips, however, shopping can become quick and easy.

Always remember to read the label of any prepared foods. Look for the sodium content per serving to see if it will fit into your restriction of 100 mmol (2000 mg) sodium per day. If the sodium content is not available, read the ingredient list. If salt or a sodium-based additive are listed as the first three to four ingredients, do not buy the product. Even products advertised as lower in sodium may still contain too much of it. The less processed the food, the better!

### Here are some examples of commercial food products and their sodium content

Product	Sodium Content
Ham	1114 mg / 3 oz
Schneider's fat free cooked ham	408 mg / 3 slices
Hot dog	700 mg / hot dog
Schneider's fat free wieners	474 mg / wiener
Chicken soup	400 mg / serving
Quaker instant hot oatmeal	230 mg / packet
Oatmeal (any brand) rolled or quick	0 mg / cup

## HEARTFELT PROFILES



I am 86 years old. My medical history is long and varied. In addition to mumps, measles and other childhood diseases, I have had scarlet fever, rheumatoid arthritis, thyroid infections, esophageal hernia, asthma and two hip replacements. In 1980, I began therapy for high blood pressure. In 1993, I was diagnosed with CHF. Presently, I take five medications to treat my thyroid, high blood pressure, CHF and angina. In addition, I have had to use a walker since 1990 because of the pain and stiffness from my arthritis.

My medical situation had left me depressed for several years. But I'm much better now. My friends

and a more active lifestyle have provided me with a new and positive attitude. One particular friend has taught me to “remember the gifts and blessings, and not the losses.”

I take care of myself by walking for 40 minutes every day, taking my medication as prescribed, eating a diet without salt, drinking 6-8 cups of liquid a day (including soup) and weighing myself weekly. When the CHF worsens, I open the window and stay in bed with a good book and soft music.

In addition to the above, I would advise CHF patients to trust in God, doctors and nurses, keep in touch with friends and stick to a positive outlook.



CHF can be managed, especially if you, the patient, take an active role. Give some special attention to yourself, and **DO REACT** to your body's needs:

**Do** weigh yourself each day

**Observe** and record any signs and symptoms of CHF

**Rest**

**Exercise**

**Avoid** salty foods and limit fluids in your diet

**Contact** your doctor if you feel unwell

**Take** your medication regularly

# COOK TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT



## Low Sodium Chicken Soup

3 lb	chicken, cut in pieces	1.5 kg
9 cups	water	2250 mL
3	celery stalks with leaves, divided	3
1	bay leaf	1
1	small onion, whole	1
1/2 cup	onion, chopped	125 mL
1/2 cup	carrot, chopped	125 mL
1/2 cup	fresh parsley, chopped	125 mL
	or 8 tsp (40 ml) dried parsley	
1/2 cup	uncooked barley	125 mL
1	turnip	1
2 tbsp	lemon juice	25 mL
1/2 tsp	freshly ground black pepper	2 mL
1/4 tsp	celery seed	1 mL
1 cup	green beans, cut	250 mL
1/4 tsp	basil	1 mL

Place chicken, water, celery leaves, bay leaf and small whole onion in a large pot. Cover and bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer 1 1/2 hours until chicken is tender. Remove chicken. Try to skim fat off broth with a baster or paper towel. Remove onion and bay leaf from soup. Remove the skin and bones from the chicken then discard them. Cut chicken into bite sized pieces, set aside. Add celery, onion, carrot, parsley, barley, turnip, lemon juice, pepper and celery seed. Cover and let simmer 20 minutes. Add green beans and chicken; continue cooking 15 minutes or until beans are tender. Add basil when approximately 5 minutes of cooking time is remaining. Makes 8 servings.

### LOW SODIUM CHICKEN SOUP

Per 1 1/2 cups (375 mL)

calories	250
protein	23 g
fat	11 g
carbohydrate	14 g
sodium	92 mg
potassium	371 mg
phosphorus	174 mg



From "Low Sodium Savvy" by L. Kerr, M. Kennedy, Clinical Dietitians, Nephrology and Renal Transplant Program, University of Alberta Hospital

If you would like to purchase a copy of this cookbook, please contact:  
 Cara Stark – Phone 780-407-1565, Fax 780-407-6015,  
 Address 5B1.07 Walter Mackenzie Centre, 8440-112 street  
 Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2B7. Cost: \$9.95 (includes GST and shipping)