

CHF News: Take It To Heart



A monthly newsletter for REACT study patients

Issue #5

It is important to take medication as it is prescribed

By Dr. Scot Simpson
Pharmacist and Cardiology Research Fellow
University of Alberta

Why do we need medication?

Medication is used to help people manage symptoms of their disease, or to prevent complications. Doctors, pharmacists and nurses trust and use medication because there is strong scientific evidence to show that it works and that it is safe. For example, several studies have looked at more than 5000 people with congestive heart failure and shown that ACE inhibitors such as Vasotec® (enalapril), Prinivil® (lisinopril) and others can reduce the risk of dying. Once a medication is started, it is up to you to continue taking it as instructed. Sticking to a long-term medication program, however, can be a great challenge for some people.

What happens if medication is not taken properly?

When medication is not taken as prescribed, patients do not benefit. Several studies have looked at people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, diabetes or epilepsy because these patients need to take medication for a long

time. The studies report that 25% to 50% of all patients will completely stop taking their medication after about a year. These results are troubling, especially when research shows that the prescribed medication can help people feel better, and in some cases, live longer.

How can medication be taken incorrectly?

Researchers have identified various ways in which patients do not take medication as prescribed by their doctor. Some of the most common are:

- Failing to fill the original prescription
- Taking larger or smaller amounts of medication than prescribed
- Taking medication at the wrong time
- Forgetting to take medication
- Stop taking medication without the doctor's advice

Why is medication taken incorrectly?

Deciding to take a medication may seem simple. However, researchers are just beginning to understand the reasons why

people do or do not take their medication properly. Some of them are:

- Past experience with medication – either good or bad
- Willingness to trust the healthcare worker's advice
- Cost of the medication
- Ability to remember to take the medication at the same time each day

What can you do to avoid taking medication incorrectly?

Your healthcare team wants to help you use your medication correctly. Here is some advice on reaching this goal:

1. Pick convenient times of the day to take your medication. Mealtime and bedtime are great because you usually eat and go to sleep at about the same time each day. Check with your pharmacist if you are unsure about how and when a certain medication should be taken. Make a list of all the medications you take and the time of day you take them. A weekly or daily medication dispenser can also help you get organized. These containers have a storage place

for four daily dose times.

Depending on whether they are still full or empty, they can help you remember if you have taken your medication.

2. Make another list of all your medications to keep with you at all times or use your REACT Medication Wallet Card. Ensure that this information is always up to date. Show it to any doctors, dentists, nurses or pharmacists who you receive care from. The list will assist them in understanding your condition and providing you with better care. This is especially important if you should need emergency medical assistance and are unable to speak.

3. Written information such as brochures and pamphlets can help answer questions about your condition and medication. Often it is very hard to remember what someone has told you, especially if it was a long time ago. You can refer back to these materials at any time. It is a good idea to review them every once in a while. Test yourself to see how much you remember! Another resource is your pharmacist, nurse or doctor. Should you have questions, speak with any one of them.

4. Knowledge is one of the best tools for maintaining your health. Before you start a new medication, find out what it will do for

you. Learn if this medication will interfere with other medications that you take. Find out what side effects may happen and what to do if you get them.

5. Ask questions! You are the most important person in making decisions about your health. To make the right choices, you need to stay informed about your condition and medication. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for information. They are there to help you.

HEARTFELT PROFILES



My heart problems began in 1971 when I was told that I would need heart surgery because of a valve that did not function properly. But there is a chance it all started much earlier when I had rheumatic fever as a child, living in Poland. In 1973 I finally had heart surgery but whatever repair was done to the valve, did not last. In 1975 I was back in the operating room, having an artificial valve implanted. I was prescribed medication and instructed to make monthly visits to the doctor and the laboratory.

Since that year, I have not had a full-time job. Instead, I helped my husband with his farming to the best of my ability. Babysitting and volunteering at church also kept me occupied. Then in 1990, I started having problems with my heart beating too quickly so I was given additional medication to slow it down. To keep close watch over my condition, the doctor suggested that I attend the Heart Function Clinic that was being set up at the University of Alberta Hospital.

Currently, at the age of 64, I am on six and occasionally seven medications. Out of necessity, I have made some lifestyle changes too. I do not use salt. I am careful about the amount of food I eat. I eat lots of fruit and vegetables. My fluid intake is restricted to 4 cups a day – no coffee. I weigh myself every morning and keep a record. For exercise, I walk a block a day. I used to be able to walk more but since I developed varicose veins, walking for longer periods of time is painful. When my caring husband passed away from cancer in 1996, I moved from the farm to a Seniors' Condominium where I am surrounded by friends, many of whom have conditions much worse than my own. My husband and I never had children so my friends are my support and I theirs.

Do I feel frustrated or upset that I have CHF? Naturally, I do. But through the years it has become part of me - second nature. What will I do when it gets worse and the medical profession cannot help any more? My faith and prayer will help me bear the discomfort. In the meantime, each day is a gift to be thankful for and an opportunity to create new memories as well as to reflect on the good old times.



Caution: SALT AHEAD!

By Pamela Monkhouse
Clinical Dietitian, University of Alberta Hospital

Cheese is a good source of calcium and a tasty treat for many of us. But oh, often so salty! Here is an adapted list from the Low Sodium Savvy Cookbook that will allow you to rate the salt content of your favourite cheese. If you can't find the low salt cheeses at the store, ask your grocer for them.

SODIUM CONTENT per 30 g of cheese		
Very Low	Less than 23 mg	Black Diamond Cheddar Cheese® (unsalted) Quark Cheese® (white, whole milk cheese) Dry Curd Cottage Cheese Kraft®: Gruyere, Unsalted Cheddar & Mozzarella
Low	Less than 100 mg	Cream Cheese Gruyere Farmer's (Kraft®) Ricotta Natural Swiss
Moderate	100 to 150 mg	Cottage Cheese Mozzarella, regular (Black Diamond®) Neufchatel (low in protein) Havarti Port Du Salut
High	150 to 200 mg	Cracker Barrel® Old & Medium "Light" Farmer's (Black Diamond®) Mozzarella, part skim (Black Diamond®) American Swiss Danish Blue Danish Danbo Danish Emmenthaler Danish Gruyere Danish Esrom Gjetost Marble Brick Brie Caraway Cheddar Cheshire Colby
Very High	200 to 300 mg	Mozzarella, reg & skim (Kraft®) Monterey Jack Limburger Camembert Provolone Muenster Tilset Edam Gouda
	Over 300 mg	Swiss processed Processed Cheese (spread, food or slices) Parmesan Roquefort Romano Blue Feta

HEARTWISE ADVICE

Know when and how to take your medication!



Ask your pharmacist if you should take your medication on an empty stomach, with food or after a meal. Ask also what to do if you forget to take it at the scheduled

time. Make a point of taking your medication at the same time each day. It will be easier to remember if you take it when you are doing something that's part of a daily routine. For example, if you always have breakfast, this is a good time to take your morning dose of medication. Your REACT medication schedule can help you remember when to take your medication.

COOK TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT



Italian Rice Casserole

2 cups	zucchini, sliced	500 mL
1/2 lb	lean ground beef	250 g
1/2 cup	onion, chopped	125 mL
1/4 cup	celery	50 mL
1	garlic clove	1
1/2 tsp	basil	2 mL
1/2 tsp	parsley	2 mL
1/4 tsp	oregano	1 mL
dash	freshly ground pepper	dash
1 cup	cooked rice, unsalted*	250 mL
1/2 cup	low sodium tomato sauce**	125 mL
1/2 cup	cottage cheese	125 mL
1	egg, beaten	1
1/2 cup	cheddar cheese, grated	125 mL

Cook zucchini in boiling water about 2 minutes; drain well. Fry ground beef, onion, celery, garlic and seasonings till meat is browned. Stir in rice and tomato sauce. Blend cottage cheese and egg. Arrange half of the zucchini slices in a one-quart (1L) casserole dish. Spoon on meat rice mixture. Spread cottage cheese over meat mixture. Top with remaining zucchini and sprinkle with cheddar cheese. Bake at 350° F (180° C) for 20 to 25 minutes or until hot and bubbly.

Makes 4 servings.

Variations:

*Substitute rice with 2 cups (500 mL) cooked pasta. Add the pasta as a separate layer before meat mixture and after cottage cheese.

**Substitute tomato sauce with 1/4 cup (50 mL) tomato paste (no added salt) and 1/4-1/2 cup (50-125 mL) water.

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)*

ITALIAN RICE CASSEROLE

Per 1 cup (250 mL)

calories	326
protein	25 g
fat	14 g
carbohydrate	24 g
sodium	161 mg
potassium	651 mg
phosphorus	296 mg



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