



Young People and Medication

The information below has been written specifically for young people to help them to understand about their medication and to encourage them to take responsibility for it as appropriate.

Part of growing up is learning to become independent and reliable.

If you have a heart condition you need to gradually learn about what is wrong with your heart and the treatments, including medications, that you need to keep safe.

It is important that you learn when to take your medicine and why.

Do you have to take medicine every day?

I bet that you do because most people who have something wrong with their heart have to take medication (medicine)

Do you know why you have to take medicine?

There are many different reasons why you might be on medication.

- You may have an unusual heartbeat.
- You may need to delay your blood from clotting (making scabs).
- You may need to give your heart muscle a bit of a boost.

Whatever the reason, it is important that as you grow up you begin to take charge of taking your medicine yourself. All grown-ups remember to take their medicine at the right time each day because they know that they will become ill if they forget. If you want to be sure that your heart works as well as possible, it is very important that you take your medicines properly, as the doctor or nurse has instructed.

What sort of medicines do you take?

Here are some of the most common drugs.

Anti-Arrhythmics

Propranolol, Digoxin, Amiodarone

These drugs help to keep your heart beating in a normal rhythm.

Anti-Coagulants

Aspirin, Warfarin

These drugs help to keep your blood running freely around your body without making sticky clots (scabs) inside your blood vessels (veins and arteries).

ACE Inhibitors

Captopril, Lisinopril

These work to open up your blood vessels so that the heart can push blood through them without having to work too hard.

Diuretics

Frusemide, Amiloride

These medications work to take strain away from the heart by encouraging your kidneys (where you make urine) to work more efficiently. This means that you need to pass urine (wee) more often but it helps the heart as the heart pumps fluid (your drinks) around your body. The less fluid, the less hard the heart has to work.

Why do you have to have tests when on medication?

It is very important to check that medications are doing their job correctly. With some drugs the doctor can see that they are working by doing a cardiac scan or checking the heart rhythm or checking the blood pressure levels.

Other medications need to be checked by a blood test. If you are taking Warfarin, it is important to make sure that the right amount of the medicine is in your blood; otherwise you may have problems bleeding for too long if you cut yourself. You will need regular blood tests, either a finger prick or sometimes if you go to the hospital a normal blood test to test your INR (International Normalised Ratio). The normal level for anyone on Warfarin is 2 - 3.5, sometimes the doctor will ask for the level to be different especially for you.

Keeping Safe on Heart Medication

The first and most important thing to remember, when you take medicine, is that forgetting to take it can make you feel ill. You may not notice on the first day but if you were to forget everyday or you decided that you did not need your drugs anymore, because your heart was better, your heart would gradually slow down or just not work properly.

Some young people, who have heart problems, decide that they want to be the same as their school friends who don't take medicine, they think that if they don't take their medication they will be a proper member of the gang!

What they forget is that if they take their medicine they are more like their friends than they would be without.

This is because, if you are born with only half a heart, it takes surgery and medicines to make sure that you can play most games with your friends.

The second thing to remember is to follow the rules that the doctor has given you about how to keep yourself self safe.

Young people who take Warfarin have to be particularly careful.

Why do young people on Warfarin have to be careful?

Warfarin is an anti-coagulant. That means that if you cut or bruise yourself you will carry on bleeding for longer than your friends would. This is not a problem at all as long as you and the people who live, study or play with you know what to do if you bleed.

Do you know what to do?

If your arm is bleeding hold it up and firmly press a clean cloth, kitchen paper or even a pad of loo roll onto the wound until the bleeding stops! It is important to call for an adult or once you have started to stop the bleeding ring them to ask for help. You might need to go to the hospital to see the doctor.



Taking My Medication: Andrew Kerry

"I've been taking medicines for nearly all of my life after being born 11 years ago with Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome.

"When I was little, Mum and Dad used to give me the medicine as a liquid in a syringe, but then after my next operation I went for a while without

needing any medicines. The next time I needed some was after Stage 3 when I was 3½, I started taking Aspirin but because the tablets were small I preferred to take them whole rather than mixed in water.

“Since then I’ve needed to take different medicines. I now take Sotalol (which helps my heart stay settled), Lisinopril (which makes it easier for the heart to pump the blood around) and Warfarin (which stops any blood clots forming inside me). I take two tablets in the morning with breakfast and four in the evening before I go to bed.

“I test my own INR, with Mum and Dad watching, to see whether my dose of Warfarin needs to be changed. Testing my blood is very easy! This is what I do: First of all I get the machine out of the case. I make sure that a test strip has been left at air temperature for five minutes. I go to wash my hands in warm water so that the blood comes out easier. I turn the CoaguChek on and check that the number on the machine matches the number on the strip packet. I take the strip out of the packet and slide it into the machine. The machine beeps and when the blood drip symbol appears it gives me a limited time to put the blood on. I do this by using a pen type thing which stabs my finger with a sharp needle - it doesn’t hurt but it makes me jump a bit! I point my finger down and squeeze the end until there is enough blood to fill the circle on the strip (quite a lot of blood is needed for this). I wait a while and then the machine displays the result. My hospital have given us a chart. If my blood reading is too high or low, Mum and Dad work out how much to change my Warfarin dose. We write the blood result in my yellow book which I keep in my school bag with other details about my heart.

“I find it a lot easier to take my medicines as tablets when I go on holiday or have a sleepover. We have a weekly tablet holder that has seven pots in it, each one divided into three bits. We put the tablets for morning and evening of each day into each pot and then it is easy to know which tablets to take next.

“At home we just use the packets. Some of the medicines come in packs where the pills have days against them. That makes it easy for Mum and Dad to check that they have remembered to give me my medicine.”