

From the desk of Virginia Esslinger, Parish Nurse.....

Calcium channel blockers.....

(continued from 7-27-2008 bulletin insert)

are a class of drugs that block the entry of calcium into the muscle cells of the heart and the arteries. It is the entry of calcium into these cells that causes the heart to contract and arteries to narrow. By blocking the entry of calcium, CCBs decrease contraction of the heart and dilate (widen) the arteries.



How Should I Take Calcium Channel Blockers?

Take this medication with food or milk. Follow the label directions on how often to take it. The number of doses you take each day, the time allowed between doses and how long you need to take it will depend on the type of medication prescribed and on your condition.

While taking this medication, have your blood pressure checked regularly, as advised by your doctor.

While taking this medication, your doctor may tell you to take and record your pulse daily. Your doctor will tell you how rapid your pulse should be. If your pulse is slower than advised, contact



your doctor or nurse about taking your calcium channel blocker that day.

What Are the Side Effects?

Side effects can include:

- Drowsiness.
- Increased appetite.
- Weight gain: call your doctor right away.
- Breathing difficulties (shortness of breath, coughing, or wheezing):
call your doctor right away.
- Irregular or slow heartbeat: call your doctor right away.
- Allergic reaction (skin rash or hair loss): call your doctor right away.
- Constipation.
- Tenderness or bleeding of the gums.
- Swelling of feet, ankles and legs.
- Fainting.

Talk to your doctor if any of these side effects (drowsiness, increased appetite, constipation, tenderness or bleeding of the gums, swelling of feet, ankles, and legs, or fainting) are persistent or severe.

Should I Be Concerned About Food and Drug Interactions?



Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while taking a calcium channel blocker.

Avoid alcohol, as it interferes with the effects of calcium channel blockers and increases the side effects.

It is important that your doctor is aware of all the medications you are taking, as some may have the potential to interact with calcium channel blockers. Talk to your doctor before taking any new medication, including over-the-counter drugs, herbs and supplements.

Can Elderly People Take Calcium Channel Blockers?

Older adults have more side effects from calcium channel blockers than younger people. As a result, lower doses are frequently prescribed.

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