

# Medicines After a Stroke

This leaflet provides information about some of the medicines that may be given after a stroke. The doctor will choose the medicines that are best for you, the doses and how often to take them. If there are any questions or concerns please speak to a doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

## What about side effects?

Side effects are unwanted symptoms caused by medicines. A small number of people will have side effects but not many people get them. The doctor, pharmacist or nurse will warn you if there are any important side effects to look out for. Please read the patient information leaflet inside the box and tell someone if you think you have a side effect.

**Do not stop taking your medicine unless you have been told to do so by a healthcare professional.**

## Drugs Commonly Given After Stroke

### Medicines to thin the blood

This group of medicines, called antiplatelets and anticoagulants reduces the likelihood of a blood clot forming and lowers the risk of another stroke. Medicines in this group work differently to prevent clots. The medication(s) most suitable for you and your risk factors for stroke will be prescribed.

#### Antiplatelet medications:

Platelets are cells that circulate around the body in the bloodstream. They are responsible for blood clotting, which is normally a very useful function; for example, when you cut yourself it stops you from bleeding excessively. Sometimes, a blood clot can form in the wrong place, within a blood vessel and cause a blockage. Blood-thinning medication reduces your blood's ability to clot and therefore reduces your risk of having a stroke. These medications are taken once a day.

- **Clopidogrel:** Makes your blood less sticky.

Side effects: For some people it causes stomach irritation, indigestion or diarrhoea.

To prevent this take it with or after food. Some patients experience a rash and if this happens see your doctor immediately.

- **Aspirin:** Makes your blood less sticky.

Side effects: For some people it causes stomach irritation and indigestion. To prevent this take it with or after food.

#### Anticoagulant medications:

Anticoagulants also stop your blood from being able to clot as easily and can reduce strokes due to blood clots from the heart (usually related to a heart condition called atrial fibrillation). Atrial fibrillation is linked with stroke as clots can form in the heart and move to the brain. Anticoagulants interfere with the proteins in your blood that are involved with the clotting (coagulation) process which means that your blood will take longer to clot.

- **Warfarin**

Warfarin interferes with the production of vitamin K which prevents your blood from clotting so easily. It requires frequent blood tests and careful monitoring to make sure you get the right dose of warfarin. The dose can change based on your blood test results but the medication is only taken once a day.

- **Direct oral anticoagulants e.g. apixaban, edoxadan, rivaroxaban, dabigatran.**

Direct oral anticoagulants interrupt the complex system involved in the formation of blood clots. This causes the blood to take longer to clot. These medicines are less influenced by diet and other medications than warfarin. These medications have a set dose which does not change and does not need regular blood tests. It is taken once or twice per day depending on which medication is used.

## Medicines to lower cholesterol/protect blood vessels

- **Statins e.g. atorvastatin**

These are used to reduce the likelihood of stroke regardless of your cholesterol levels if your stroke was caused by a blocked blood vessel. If your cholesterol is high (over 4mmol/l) statins with dietary changes (less saturated fat) can help lower cholesterol levels in the blood. High levels of cholesterol in the blood can make your arteries narrow, which can cause strokes. A rare side effect of statins is inflammation of the muscles. It is important to tell your doctor straight away if you notice unexplained muscle pain or weakness. Statins are taken once a day.

## Medicines to lower blood pressure

Ensuring your blood pressure is well controlled reduces the risk of another stroke. In order to help your blood pressure medication work well you should try to cut down on salt in your diet and exercise more often.

- **Amlodipine, nifedipine, felodipine**

These cause the blood vessels to widen making it easier for blood to flow through. Side effects: dizziness, headache, flushing and ankle swelling.

- **Ramipril, lisinopril, enalapril, perindopril.**

These cause the blood vessels to relax and widen, making it easier for blood to flow through. Side effects: Some patients can develop a dry cough in which case you should see your doctor who can prescribe a different medicine. An allergic reaction including swollen lips and/or rash in which case you should seek attention immediately. These can affect your kidney function so blood tests may be needed.

- **Bendroflumethiazide, indapamide**

These widen blood vessels making it easier for blood to flow through and remove excess water and salt.

Side effects: Increased frequency of passing urine, so we recommend taking them in the morning. Other side effects include dizziness and gout.

- **Bisoprolol, atenolol, carvedilol**

These medications also help to control heart rate if you have atrial fibrillation (abnormal heart rhythm). These help your heart beat more slowly and with less force.

Side effect: cold hands and feet and tiredness which usually wears off.

DO NOT SUDDENLY STOP TAKING THIS MEDICINE.

- **Doxazosin**

This causes blood vessels to widen making it easier for blood to flow through.

Side effects: dizziness, dry mouth, increased need to pass urine.

## Medicines to protect the stomach

- **Lansoprazole, omeprazole and ranitidine**

These are sometimes used to protect the stomach from irritation or indigestion from medicines that thin the blood. It will depend on your risk factors whether you are given one of these. The medication you use may be changed due to interactions with newly started medications.

Side effects: diarrhoea, constipation, nausea and increased risk of fractures.

## Clinical Trials Medications

Some patients take part in clinical trials which can involve taking medications; these can be well-known or new medications. If you are taking a clinical trial medication you will be provided with specific information about when to take the medication and any side effects. For more information about clinical trial medication please contact the stroke research team on 020 8725 3260.

## How do I get a repeat prescription?

Your GP will receive a copy of your discharge prescription and they will provide you with a further supply of your medicines unless you are told otherwise.

## Talk to your community pharmacist

When you leave hospital, you are entitled to a free service to advise you about your medicines from your local community pharmacist. You can visit your pharmacy or speak on the phone with the pharmacist, who can talk to you about all your medications, what they are for, discuss any side effects and if you have any problems taking your medicines. Your pharmacist can help with stop smoking programmes, healthy living advice, and weight management services.

## Contact Us

If you have any questions or concerns about medicines given to you by St George's Hospital, please contact the Patient Medicines Helpline on 020 8725 1033 (Monday to Friday 9.15am to 5:00pm).

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

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## Additional services

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

## NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111



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