Side Effects for Atrial Fibrillation Medications

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Atrial Fibrillation and Anti-Coagulants

Atrial fibrillation is generally treated long-term with medication that is either designed to repair the heart rhythm (sinus rhythm) to normal or to control the heart rate. Often with either of these medications, a patient with this condition will also be required to take anti-coagulants to help prevent blood clots from forming and reduce the risk of stroke. All medication that is prescribed for atrial fibrillation tends to have a wide range of side effects; however, the benefits of the medications seem to outweigh the adverse effects caused by the medication.

Side effects are an area of concern with any type of medication that can be taken for any given condition/reason. There are a variety of medication types that can be taken to help treat and control the symptoms of atrial fibrillation, and each type of medication carries its side effects to be considered. Two types of medication are generally prescribed for those dealing with atrial fibrillation: anti-arrhythmic and anti-coagulant. Anti-arrhythmic medication is given to either control the heart rate or to work on resetting the heart to normal sinus rhythm. There is a wide variety of medications within this grouping, and each has its list of side effects. Anti-coagulant medication is prescribed in combination with anti-arrhythmic medication to reduce blood clots and prevent strokes.

Anti-Arrhythmic Medication and Their Side Effects

As noted, anti-arrhythmic medications are prescribed to regulate sinus rhythm or lower the heart rate. Some common side effects of anti-arrhythmic medications include fatigue, low blood pressure, impotence, nausea, vomiting, constipation, coldness of hands and feet, or swelling in the ankles. Some medications that carry some of the more severe side effects include amiodarone and digoxin.

Amiodarone is almost a hybrid anti-arrhythmic medication being a combination of sodium and potassium channel blockers. It is the most prescribed anti-arrhythmic drug even though it is not approved by the FDA for atrial fibrillation treatment. Some of the more severe side effects that can be caused by taking amiodarone include sensitivity to sunlight, lung toxicity problems, deposits in the eye, as well as changes to liver and thyroid function. With amiodarone presenting the possibility of severe side effects, it is typically only prescribed when other medications have failed in patients with severe symptoms of atrial fibrillation.

Digoxin is another anti-arrhythmic medication that can produce a large scale of side effects for patients with atrial fibrillation. It can cause some of the more common side effects such as nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and diarrhea. Digoxin has also been known to cause some more serious side effects such as confusion, dizziness, insomnia, nightmares, agitation, and depression. On the most severe side, some very rare effects digoxin can have on atrial fibrillation patients include psychosis, delirium, amnesia, and some more severe heart and arrhythmia issues.