

ConsumerRx[®]

Calcium Channel Blockers

What are Calcium Channel Blockers (CCBs)?

Calcium Channel Blockers are medications that are used to treat heart conditions like high blood pressure and chronic chest pain. These medications work by limiting the flow of calcium into the cells of the heart and blood vessels. This limit of calcium causes the blood vessels to relax and widen, which lowers blood pressure and improves oxygen flow to the heart.

When should Calcium Channel Blockers be used?

Medications may be useful if your goals are not met by exercise, weight loss, or decreased salt intake.

- **For High Blood Pressure:** A CCB is typically used when other treatments, such as ACE inhibitors (e.g. **lisinopril**, **enalapril**) or beta-blockers (e.g. **atenolol**, **metoprolol**) have not been effective.
- **For Chronic Chest Pain:** CCBs are appropriate for people when beta-blockers are ineffective or not well tolerated. Additionally generic CCBs (**diltiazem**, **felodipine**, **nicardipine**, and **nifedipine ER**) are as effective as brand name CCBs (Norvasc[®] and Sular[®]) in the treatment of chronic chest pain.
- **For other Indications:** CCBs have also been used in the treatment of certain abnormal heart rhythms, migraine prevention, pulmonary hypertension and Raynaud's Syndrome.

What are my Calcium Channel Blocker options?

You have the following choices, which vary in cost but have similar clinical benefits.

Generic Medications: ~\$10 - \$50*

diltiazem (Cardizem[®], Tiazac[®])
diltiazem SR (Cardizem CD[®], Cardizem SR[®], Dilacor XR[®])
felodipine (Plendil[®])
nicardipine (Cardene[®])
nifedipine (Adalat[®], Procardia[®])
nifedipine SA (Adalat CC[®])
nifedipine ER (Procardia XL[®])
verapamil (Calan[®], Isoptin[®], Verelan[®])
verapamil SR (Calan SR[®], Isoptin SR[®])

Non-Preferred Brands: ~\$55 - \$85*

Covera HS[®]
Dynacirc[®]
Dynacirc CR[®]
Norvasc[®]
Sular[®]
Verelan PM[®]

*Approximate cost estimates based on a 30-day supply. Actual prices may vary depending on your pharmacy and the amount or strength of medication dispensed. Brand names in () are non-formulary and are listed for your reference only.

Are there differences in effectiveness and side effects with Calcium Channel Blockers?

All CCBs have been shown to be similarly effective, but they may have some differences in side effects. The most common side effects seen with CCBs are dizziness, headache and flushing. Less frequent side effects include fluid in the ankles, feet or lower limbs. Please check with your doctor or pharmacist if you have problems or concerns with your medication.

Why is Norvasc not on the Preferred Medication List?

Although the manufacturer of Norvasc spends million of dollars on advertising, this CCB has not been proven to be safer or more effective than generic CCBs, yet is generally more expensive.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Most CCBs compare in terms of effectiveness and safety. Often, a less expensive generic medication may work just as well as a more expensive brand name. Taking this into consideration may help you reduce your health care expenses.

Note: Since many medication options are available, our physicians and pharmacists developed this to provide you with information about the available alternatives, as well as potential advantages and lack of advantages of the various products. This medication summary was developed based upon an evaluation of information from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), scientific studies, and input from practicing doctors and specialists.