

SGLT2 inhibitor medicines for heart failure – patient leaflet

Dapagliflozin (Forxiga[®]), Empagliflozin (Jardiance[®])

You have been prescribed a medication called a SGLT2 inhibitor (SGLT2i) by your heart failure team. This medication was originally developed to treat diabetes, but it was found to also protect the heart and reduce the symptoms of heart failure. It is now commonly prescribed to people with and without diabetes as a treatment for heart failure.

The information in this leaflet will help you to get the best out of your medication. More information is available in the manufacturer's leaflet dispensed in the box with your medication.

How do they work?

SGLT2 inhibitors act in the kidneys to stop glucose, salt and water being absorbed back into the bloodstream. These substances are passed out in the urine instead. We do not know the exact mechanism of the benefits in heart failure, but we know that taking a SGLT2 inhibitor reduces the risk of hospital admission and death from heart problems.

What are the common side effects?

Common side effects of these medicines include urine infections and infections in the genital area due to the increased amount of sugar in the urine. These are usually mild and can be treated – ask your GP or pharmacist for advice if you develop any discomfort in this area. There are things that you can do to reduce infections:

- Wear loose-fitting underwear
- Wash regularly with unperfumed soap

It is important to keep well hydrated (drink at least 6-8 glasses of fluid per day, unless advised otherwise by your healthcare professional) whilst taking these medicines. If you become unwell with an illness that means you are at risk of dehydration (e.g. diarrhoea or vomiting) it is best to **stop your SGLT2i** until you are eating and drinking normally again. If you are unsure, contact your GP for advice.

Loss of sugar in the urine due to these medicines may reduce the calories that your body absorbs and can sometimes make you lose weight. If you find that you are losing weight unintentionally, please speak to your GP.

Rare side effects

Very rarely, these medicines can cause an increase of acid in the blood called 'diabetic ketoacidosis', even in people who do not have diabetes. Symptoms of this can include nausea and vomiting, abdominal (central tummy) pain, rapid breathing, and dehydration. If you experience these symptoms, seek immediate medical help from your GP or NHS 111. The risk of this side effect is increased if you follow a very low carbohydrate (ketogenic) diet; please seek advice from a health professional before starting any new diet. It is also important to keep alcohol intake within the recommended limit of 14 units per week.

There is an extremely low risk (1 in 100,000) that these medicines can cause a severe spreading skin infection in the genital or groin area called Fournier's gangrene. If you develop severe pain, redness or swelling in this area, seek medical help immediately.

Monitoring

You will need to continue your usual monitoring as advised by your specialist or GP. This will usually include regular checks of your blood pressure and pulse, and blood tests.

If you start to experience any new symptoms, or your symptoms worsen, please contact your GP or heart failure nurse. In particular, the symptoms to watch out for are:

- Increased weight
- Increased breathlessness, needing more pillows at night.
- Swollen feet, ankles, legs, or abdomen.
- Increased tiredness.

More information about living with heart failure can be found on the NHS website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heart-failure/living-with/>

For more support and information about your new medication, ask your Community Pharmacist about the New Medicines Service.