Potentially harmful drugs to avoid in heart failure

Regularly review medicines as some pose a cardiac risk including exacerbation of heart failure.\(^1,2\) Examples of some medicines that require caution are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medicine</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)\(^3\)  
Includes selective COX-2 agents (e.g. celecoxib)\(^3\)  
Does not refer to low dose aspirin | NB. NSAIDs are often in analgesic preparations and in non prescription medications.  
- May cause sodium and water retention, peripheral vasoconstriction, worsen heart failure, and decrease renal function\(^1,6\)  
- Acute renal failure may be more likely when these agents are used in combination with an ACE inhibitor (ACEI) / angiotensin receptor blocker (ARB) and/or diuretic\(^3,7\)  
- May increase the risk of myocardial infarction, particularly in patients with higher cardiovascular risk\(^4\) | • Avoid use.\(^2,4,8\) Consider cardiac risk and comorbidities before prescribing\(^4\), and weigh up whether the benefits outweigh the potential harms.  
• If essential to use with ACEI/ARB, monitor renal function, serum potassium, and signs of heart failure.\(^3\) Use for the shortest time at the lowest possible dose\(^4\)  
• Choose alternative analgesic for the condition, e.g.:  
  – paracetamol for osteoarthritis\(^7\), headache or mild pain  
  – paracetamol with codeine for more severe pain  
  – Gout may be treated with: colchicine (however consider the potential for diarrhoea and impact upon fluid status); or intra-articular corticosteroids\(^8\) |
| Non-dihydropyridine calcium channel blockers –verapamil and diltiazem\(^1,3\) | Negative inotropic effect\(^9\) may further depress cardiac function. Risk is greatest with verapamil, then diltiazem and least risk with dihydropyridines, but use with caution\(^7\) | • Non-dihydropyridine calcium channel blockers are contraindicated in systolic heart failure\(^7\), but may be useful in heart failure with preserved ejection fraction where slowing heart rate can increase filling time  
• Dihydropyridine calcium channel blockers, such as amlodipine and felodipine, may be used to treat comorbidities such as hypertension or coronary heart disease.\(^10\)  
NB. Can compromise attaining optimal dosage of ACEIs/ARBs, beta-blockers and aldosterone antagonists in systolic heart failure |
Potentially harmful drugs to avoid in heart failure continued...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medicine</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Some anti-arrhythmics, such as flecainide\(^3\) and dronedarone\(^10\) | • Flecainide may increase the risk of ventricular arrhythmias in impaired left ventricular function and may worsen heart failure\(^7\)  
• Dronedarone has been associated with an increased mortality in patients with heart failure NYHA class IV and NYHA classes II-III with a recent hospitalisation for heart failure\(^10\) | • Preference is for heart failure specific beta-blockers (particularly in systolic heart failure) or amiodarone\(^1\)  
• Digoxin may be used for rate control in atrial fibrillation\(^10\)  
• Dronedarone is contraindicated in patients with heart failure NYHA class IV and NYHA classes II-III with a recent hospitalisation for heart failure\(^10\) (Dronedarone is not currently marketed in Australia) |
| Tricyclic antidepressants\(^3\) | May prolong QT interval and cause arrhythmias\(^4\) as well as hypotension from alpha-blocking effects | Consider cardiac risk and comorbidities before prescribing\(^4\). Alternatives may be SSRIs\(^8\) but interactions via CYP450 system must also be considered |
| Thiazolidinediones (e.g. rosiglitazone, pioglitazone)\(^1\) | • May cause fluid retention and heart failure by increasing renal sodium reabsorption.\(^4\)  
• Insulin increases risk of heart failure\(^2,7\)  
• Rosiglitazone increases risk of myocardial infarction\(^4\) | • Rosiglitazone is contraindicated in patients with heart failure\(^4\)  
• Pioglitazone is contraindicated in heart failure NYHA classes II–IV.\(^7\) It should be used cautiously in NYHA class I\(^7\). |
| Corticosteroids\(^11\) | • May worsen heart failure due to sodium and water retention (mineralocorticoid effect)\(^5,7\)  
• High dose corticosteroids may cause arrhythmias\(^4\) | Consider:  
• Cardiac risk and comorbidities before prescribing\(^4\)  
• Alternative therapy\(^2\)  
• Alternative route (intra-articular injection rather than systemic corticosteroids for the treatment of gout\(^9\) or oral corticosteroids for short courses) |
| Oncology treatments such as anthracyclines, trastuzumab\(^11\) | Anthracyclines (doxorubicin, daunorubicin), cyclophosphamide, trastuzumab, tyrosine kinase inhibitors (e.g. sunitinib) may cause heart failure\(^4\) | • Consider cardiac risk and comorbidities before prescribing\(^4\)  
• Monitor cardiac function ensuring baseline measures pre-treatment are undertaken\(^4,10\) |
| Clozapine\(^11\) | May cause cardiomyopathy and myocarditis\(^4\) | • Consider cardiac risk and comorbidities before prescribing\(^4\)  
• Monitor: cardiac function\(^4\) including measures pre-treatment and well as signs and symptoms of heart failure\(^3\). A monitoring protocol is available from: www0.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/pd/2012/PD2012_005.html |
**Potentially harmful drugs to avoid in heart failure continued...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medicine</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tumour necrosis factor antagonists (e.g. infliximab, etanercept)</td>
<td>May cause heart failure&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Contraindicated in moderate or severe heart failure (NYHA class III–IV) and left ventricular ejection fraction &lt;50%; use cautiously in mild disease&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moxonidine&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Associated with increased mortality in heart failure&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Contraindicated in heart failure&lt;sup&gt;7,10&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicines available without a prescription</td>
<td>• Medicines with high salt content may cause fluid retention, e.g. effervescent preparations such as Panadol Soluble&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;, Berocca&lt;sup&gt;®&lt;/sup&gt;, and Ura&lt;sup&gt;®&lt;/sup&gt; sachets</td>
<td>• Check label of preparations such as vitamins for sodium content and choose alternatives lower in salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Note that many NSAIDs are also available without a prescription see NSAIDS above)</td>
<td>• Decongestants for coughs and colds such as pseudoephedrine may increase workload on the heart</td>
<td>• Avoid decongestants. If necessary use topical preparations such as nasal sprays, rather than the systemic route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Constipation medications taken with a large amount of water such as bulk-forming agents (e.g. Metamucil)</td>
<td>• Water required for medicines should be included as part of daily fluid allowance. Consider alternatives if unable to keep to recommended fluid allowance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information contained in the above tables is a guide only. Please refer to a comprehensive reference for further information.

**References**

8. McMurray JJ, Adamopoulos S, Anker SD, Auricchio A, Bohm M, Dickstein K, et al. ESC Guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic heart failure 2012: The Task Force for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Acute and Chronic Heart Failure 2012 of the European Society of Cardiology. Developed in collaboration with the Heart Failure Association (HFA) of the ESC. Eur Heart J 2012;33(14):1787-847.