

Digoxin

Digoxin is a medication that has been used for many years. It was first described by a doctor from Birmingham called William Withering in 1785 when he found that extracting the sap of the foxglove could help patients suffering with 'Dropsy' (what we would now call heart failure). As such it is often said to be the start of modern medicines.

Through this time opinion regarding the use of digoxin has been varied and this has continued to the present day. If you look for information on digoxin in text books and on the internet you will find widely differing views and it is important to ensure your information is up to date.

Digoxin is a medication commonly used in the treatment of atrial fibrillation (where the upper chambers (atria) of the heart beat irregularly) and atrial flutter (where the upper chambers (atria) beat rapidly but regularly). In some people with heart failure (where the main pumping chamber (the left ventricle) loses its strength) it can be used to increase the force of contraction to assist with improving a patient's symptoms.

Dosing

Digoxin is prescribed as a once daily medication. However in most people you will find that the doctor asks you to initially take it twice daily to 'load' the body to speed up its initial effects.

Side Effects

Digoxin is a medication which can present with signs of toxicity (high levels of digoxin in the blood even though the dose taken has remained unchanged). The symptoms of toxicity include; loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, blurred vision, visual disturbances (yellow-green halos around people or objects, some people describe these as auras), confusion, drowsiness, dizziness, nightmares, agitation.

If you are concerned that your digoxin tablets may now be causing problems such as these it is important to seek medical advice promptly.

Monitoring

Digoxin is a safe medication for long term use. It is always advisable to have regular check ups while on the medication and this may be done once to twice a year. Generally the effects of digoxin can be monitored just through physical examination (taking the pulse and the blood pressure) but occasionally the doctor may ask for a blood test to be performed to check the level of the digoxin in the blood although this is not routine practice.

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Please remember that this publication provides general guidelines only. Individuals should always discuss their condition with a healthcare professional. If you would like further information or would like to provide feedback please contact AF-A.