

Medications for a Healthier Heart

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The popularity of television series such as *Survivor* and *Lost* causes one to wonder what medications a physician would recommend to heart patients stranded on an island. If the physician could choose only three medicines, what would they be? First of all, heart disease is responsible for over half a million deaths a year in the United States. Decreasing controllable risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, excess weight, inactivity, stress, and diabetes will minimize the chances for a cardiac event, such as a heart attack, stroke, or even death, in the future.

On an island, the first medication that I would recommend is either an **ACE Inhibitor** or **ARB**. These two classes of medications would not only help control blood pressure, but also would have positive effects on the heart and kidneys by slowing the progression of heart and kidney disease.

The second medication that I would recommend is a **statin**. The drugs in this class lower both total and LDL cholesterol. A lower LDL cholesterol value decreases the chances for a clot formation in blood vessels, which can lead to heart attacks and strokes. Statins are also believed to have other benefits for the blood vessels in addition to their cholesterol-lowering effects. Numerous studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of both ACE Inhibitors/ARBs and of statins in decreasing the likelihood of, or delaying a cardiac event.

The third medication I would recommend is **aspirin**. In doses of 81-162mg per day, aspirin has enough antiplatelet properties to help decrease the formation of clots that block blood circulation. Aspirin would also help with the occasional aches, pains, and headaches one might experience during life as a castaway.

Since there would be no supply of cigarettes, risk of a cardiac event would be reduced by half: A pack-a-day smoker has more than twice the risk of a heart attack than that of a non-smoker. Also, fruit and fish would likely be the main sources of nutrition – this would help reduce a person's weight and cholesterol. In order to survive on a deserted island, one would be more active: This additional exercise would improve blood circulation and decrease both blood pressure and cholesterol.

Life on a deserted island would likely be more stressful. Whether on a deserted island or in normal life, stress cannot necessarily be avoided, but one can learn to manage it. Constant and unrelieved stress contributes significantly to high blood pressure and increased fat levels in the blood. This can overtax the heart and further contribute to the development of heart disease.

One may question: Why do diabetes medications not make the top-three list? The answer is that the consequences of diabetes, such as heart attacks, kidney disease, and strokes are the biggest problems for diabetics. By helping the heart and kidney with the other three medicines, and by living a healthier lifestyle, the effects of diabetes can be diminished significantly.

While the prospect of living on a deserted island may be too adventuresome for most of us, we can help ourselves decrease our risk factors. Together – with our physicians – we can find the best strategy and medications to lead a more fulfilling and healthier lifestyle.

Bio – Anthony Maglione, MD

Dr. Maglione received his medical degree from the University of Rome in Rome, Italy, and has completed his residency at Booth Memorial Medical Center in Queens, NY. Additionally, he completed his cardiology fellowship at the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, OH. Dr. Maglione is a board certified cardiologist with clinical interests in the areas of preventive cardiology, heart failure, cholesterol management, echocardiography, and nuclear medicine, and is on the physician staff of Wilmington Cardiology, PLLC.