Controlled- and extended-release metoprolol reduced mortality in congestive heart failure


**Question**
In patients with symptomatic congestive heart failure (CHF), does controlled- and extended-release (CR-XL) metoprolol used with standard therapy reduce mortality?

**Design**
Randomized (allocation concealed*), blinded (patients, clinicians, and outcome assessors),* placebo-controlled trial with planned interim analyses.

**Setting**
313 centers in 13 European countries and the United States.

**Patients**
3991 patients (mean age 64 y, 77% men) with stable symptomatic CHF for ≥ 3 months (New York Heart Association [NYHA] class II to IV) who were receiving optimal standard therapy. Patients were also required to have had an ejection fraction ≤ 40% within 3 months and heart rate ≥ 68 beats/min. Exclusion criteria were recent myocardial infarction or unstable angina; recent use of, need for, or contraindications to β-blockers; CHF secondary to systemic disease or alcohol abuse; recent or scheduled cardiac surgery; second- or third-degree heart block; hypertension; or use of amiodarone or calcium antagonists, such as diltiazem or verapamil. Other calcium-channel blockers that do not decrease heart rate were allowed. Follow-up was 100%.

** Intervention**
After a 2-week run-in period, patients were allocated to CR-XL metoprolol (n = 1990) or placebo (n = 2001). Metoprolol was started at 12.5 or 25 mg once per day depending on severity of CHF; it was titrated up to 200 mg once per day in 2-week intervals.

**Main Outcome Measures**
All-cause mortality alone or combined with hospitalization.

**Main Results**
The study was stopped early (mean follow-up 1 y vs planned follow-up of 2.4 y) because of reduced mortality at the second interim analysis. Patients in the metoprolol group had lower rates of all-cause mortality (P < 0.001) and mortality from cardiovascular events (P < 0.001), sudden death (P = 0.001), and worsening CHF (P = 0.002) (Table) than did patients in the placebo group. The groups did not differ for the rate of patients who stopped taking study medication (14% for metoprolol vs 15% for placebo, P = 0.4).

**Conclusion**
Controlled- and extended-release metoprolol reduced mortality at 1 year in patients with congestive heart failure.

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*See Glossary.

### Controlled- and extended-release metoprolol vs placebo for patients with symptomatic congestive heart failure (CHF)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metoprolol</th>
<th>Placebo</th>
<th>RRR (95% CI)</th>
<th>NNT (CI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All-cause</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>33.5% (19 to 46)</td>
<td>28 (19 to 54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>37.3% (23 to 49)</td>
<td>27 (19 to 48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudden death</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>40.5% (22 to 55)</td>
<td>38 (25 to 77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worsening CHF</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>42.6% (11 to 63)</td>
<td>90 (50 to 419)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Abbreviations defined in Glossary; RRR, NNT, and CI calculated from data in article.

**Commentary**
The Metoprolol CR/XL Randomised Intervention Trial in Congestive Heart Failure (MERIT-HF) is the second published trial in the past year that has assessed β-blockade in patients with CHF. The 34% reduction in all-cause mortality in this large trial was consistent with a recent meta-analysis (1) and the Cardiac Insufficiency Bisoprolol Study II (CIBIS-II) (2). The incremental benefits of β-blockade were shown because 90% of patients were also taking angiotension-converting enzyme inhibitors. Patients were mainly in NYHA functional class II or III (96%). CR-XL metoprolol was well tolerated. When titrated up, the mean daily dose was 159 mg, with most patients receiving ≥ 100 mg (87%) and 64% receiving 200 mg. A predefined subgroup analysis according to baseline characteristics showed a consistent reduction in mortality in all groups. The reduction in death from worsening CHF extends the findings of the CIBIS-II trial (2).

Substantial data support the routine use of β-blockers in patients with NYHA class II or III disease. These data come mainly from studies of β-selective antagonists (metoprolol or bisoprolol) or nonselective antagonists with α-receptor blocker and antioxidant properties (carvedilol). No large trials of patients with CHF have examined the effects of a pure nonselective β-receptor antagonist. Because of the possibility of a difference in effect on mortality between selective and nonselective β-blockers, further studies are needed before a general effect on mortality can be assumed for all β-blockers. Other studies of β-blockade in patients with CHF are also required for those in NYHA class IV or those with preserved left ventricle ejection function.

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**References**