

Facing Heart Failure With Confidence

Understanding Symptoms and Treatments



Be Informed, Feel Empowered

Heart failure is a recurrent condition that affects one in five people over age 40.* In fact, about 5.7 million Americans live with heart failure, and it's one of the most common reasons why people ages 65 and older go to the hospital.

In some cases, heart failure is reversible, but it's still a serious condition with no cure. However, many people can live a full life when it is managed with the right medical treatment, medications and lifestyle changes.

Use this guide to understand heart failure better and learn how to cope with it while feeling whole in body, mind and spirit.

*Source: American Heart Association



Understanding Heart Failure

Heart failure is a chronic condition that prevents your heart from pumping enough oxygenated blood to your cells. To compensate, your heart's chambers enlarge, the heart's muscle mass increases and your heart may pump faster.

Your blood vessels also narrow to keep blood pressure up, and your body directs blood to your heart and brain, and away from less important tissues and organs. These compensatory measures may work for a little bit, but they mask heart failure temporarily.

Who Is at Risk for Heart Failure?

Most frequently, heart failure occurs in people who have:

- A current or past heart condition
- Coronary artery disease
- Had a heart attack in the past
- High blood pressure



Types of Heart Failure

There are two main types of heart failure: left-sided heart failure and right-sided heart failure. Left-sided heart failure is the most common.

Left-Sided Heart Failure

When the left side of your heart is in failure, it works harder to pump the same amount of blood. In systolic failure, the left ventricle doesn't contract normally, and your heart can't pump with enough force to propel blood to your body. In diastolic failure, the left ventricle can't relax properly because the muscle is too stiff, and your heart can't fill with enough blood in between each beat.

Right-Sided Heart Failure

Often caused by left-sided heart failure, right-sided heart failure causes increased fluid pressure that circulates back to your lungs, which damages your heart's right side. This can cause blood to back up in the body's veins, causing swelling in your legs, ankles or abdomen.

Congestive Heart Failure

Congestive heart failure is the result of your body not being able to manage the pressure or volume in your heart or lungs. It results in fluid building up in your lungs.



Getting Ahead of Your Diagnosis

In the early stages of heart failure, you might not notice the first symptoms because your body compensates by making your heart work harder. Eventually, you'll feel and notice symptoms. If you notice these warning signs, talk with your doctor about testing and treatment.

SHORTNESS OF BREATH

An inability to breathe normally or deeply, without chest discomfort.

CHRONIC COUGHING OR WHEEZING

Coughing that produces white or pink blood-tinged mucus.

BUILDUP OF FLUID

Swelling in the feet, ankles, legs or abdomen, or weight gain.

DIZZINESS

Feeling dizzy or lightheaded or fainting.

FATIGUE OR WEAKNESS

Sustained exhaustion and decreased physical and mental ability.

NAUSEA OR LACK OF APPETITE

Being full or sick to your stomach.

CONFUSION OR IMPAIRED THINKING

Memory loss, forgetfulness and feelings of disorientation.

FAST HEART RATE

Your heart is racing or throbbing (palpitations).



How Your Doctor Diagnoses Heart Failure

If you notice any signs of heart failure, your doctor might order some tests or procedures to diagnose any problems with your heart's function. Tests often focus on examining your heart's ventricles (lower chambers) and their ability to pump enough blood to your body, as well as how they relax and fill with the right amount of blood.

If you have heart failure, your doctor will work with you to determine what type of heart failure you have, so that you can choose the best treatment options to help you lead a full life.



Helping Your Heart Beat Stronger for Longer

The best heart failure treatments for you will likely be a combination of changing lifestyle factors, medications and other adjustments to improve your daily life.

Lifestyle Factors

Your doctor may recommend:

- Avoiding alcohol and caffeine
- Avoiding tight socks or stockings
- Being physically active
- Developing social support
- Eating a low-sodium, low-fat diet
- Getting sufficient rest
- Getting appropriate vaccinations (like flu or pneumonia)
- Losing weight
- Managing stress
- Monitoring blood pressure
- Quitting smoking
- Tracking daily fluid intake
- Weigh yourself daily

Cardiac Rehab

Cardiac rehab stabilizes, slows and may even reverse the progression of heart failure. It often includes exercise training, education on heart-healthy living and counseling to reduce stress.



Medications

Depending on your needs, you might be prescribed:

- **Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme (ACE) Inhibitor:** lowers blood pressure and decreases the heart's workload
- **Angiotensin Receptor Blocker (ARB):** lowers blood pressure
- **Angiotensin-Receptor Neprilysin Inhibitor (ARNI):** improves artery opening and blood flow, reduces sodium retention and decreases strain on the heart
- **Beta-Blocker:** lowers blood pressure and slows heart rate
- **Digoxin:** helps your heart pump better
- **Diuretics:** helps rid the body of extra water and sodium
- **Vasodilator:** lowers blood pressure by relaxing blood vessels, allowing them to open

Devices and Surgical Procedures

Talk to your doctor about surgical procedures and devices that could improve your heart function.

IMPLANTABLE CARDIOVERTER-DEFIBRILLATOR (ICD)

Defibrillators can help if you have serious arrhythmias (irregular heartbeats). These devices are surgically placed to keep your heart on pace when a life-threatening abnormal heart rhythm is detected.

CARDIAC RESYNCHRONIZATION THERAPY (CRT)

This therapy involves a special pacemaker to help control your heart's contractions. It can be recommended if your heart's electrical signals are off, which changes how it normally beats.

LEFT VENTRICULAR ASSIST DEVICE (LVAD)

An LVAD might be recommended if you're waiting on a heart transplant. It is a surgically implantable, portable device that can temporarily help weakened ventricles with a mechanism that keeps your heart pumping.

HEART TRANSPLANTATION

If you have severe, progressive heart failure, a heart transplant might be your best option. This procedure replaces your heart with a healthier, donated heart.

Ongoing Medical Care

Actively monitor your symptoms and see your doctor if you feel any changes in your health. Contact your doctor right away if you experience:

- Changes in physical abilities
- Chest pain
- Coughing up mucus
- Confusion, dizziness or lightheadedness
- Decreased appetite
- Difficulty breathing
- Fever or flu
- Gaining more than three pounds within days
- Swelling in your feet, ankles or other parts of your body





Healing From Heart Failure Starts Here

Serving award-winning cardiac care, AdventHealth is determined to not only help you cope with a heart failure diagnosis but lead your best life while feeling whole in body, mind and spirit.

Our board-certified cardiologists and cardiovascular surgeons perform the latest life-saving diagnostic and treatment procedures and can help you heal with the best possible outcome.

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