

Managing Your Health with Heart Failure



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What is Heart Failure?

The term “heart failure” may sound scary, as if the heart stops working. But it’s a little different than that.

Heart failure (HF) actually means your heart is not pumping blood as well as it should. Less pumping means less oxygen to your body, which can leave you feeling tired and run down. Heart failure can also cause swelling due to excess buildup of fluid in your lungs or legs. This is called edema, and often results in shortness of breath. Heart failure is a serious condition, and requires lifelong attention by both you and your healthcare providers. The good news is the condition can be managed with medications, reduced salt intake and daily physical activity. With the support of family and friends who understand your condition, you can help turn your lifestyle changes into healthy new habits.

Common Causes of Heart Failure

Heart attacks and coronary artery disease (CAD) are the most common causes of heart failure.

These conditions damage the heart muscle and can cause it to weaken, enlarge or stiffen.

Heart failure can also be caused by:

- High blood pressure
- Diseased heart muscles (known as cardiomyopathy)
- Heart valve problems
- An abnormal heart rhythm
- Excessive and prolonged use of alcohol
- Bacterial or viral infections that damage the heart muscle
- Some chemotherapy medications

Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms may vary from one person to another.

It is a good idea to track your daily symptoms and discuss them with your doctors. Responding to symptoms as soon as they begin is an important part of managing heart failure. Taking your medications exactly as prescribed and paying attention to your body can help keep your condition under control.

Common symptoms to watch out for include:

- Sudden, unexplained weight gain
- Shortness of breath with or without activity
- Swelling in legs, ankles, feet or abdomen

Other warning signs:

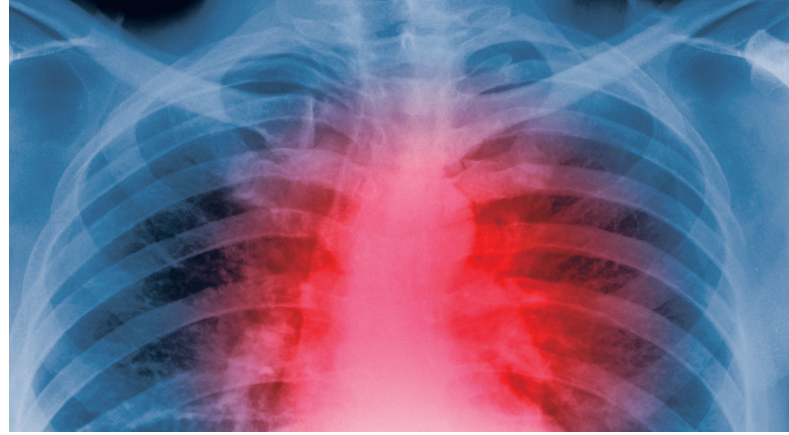
- A continuous, dry, irritating cough
- Loss of appetite or feeling full very quickly
- Increased weakness or feeling more tired than usual with normal activity
- Chest pain or increased heart rate or irregular rhythm
- Dizziness or lightheadedness while resting or walking

Managing Heart Failure with Lifestyle Changes

Making changes to your daily routine can relieve symptoms of heart failure and prevent your condition from worsening. While habits are often hard to break, taking steps toward a healthier lifestyle will help you live life to the fullest. The following tips will help you be aware and take care of your physical and emotional health.

Controlling Your Weight

Excess weight puts more strain on the heart and is a risk factor for high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease and diabetes. Reduce your meal portion sizes and intake of high-calorie foods, fats, oils and sugars.



Tips for tracking your weight:

- Weigh yourself every day at the same time
- Record your weight in a log and look for changes from day to day and week to week
- Notify your doctor of any sudden weight gain (this may be caused by fluid retention and can increase the strain on your heart)
- Ask your doctor about a diuretic (water pill) action plan

Stop Smoking

People who quit smoking are much more likely to see an improvement in their HF symptoms. Smoking can damage your heart as well as your lungs. For help quitting and support, visit smokefree.gov.

Limit Alcohol Consumption

In excess, alcohol damages your heart and can make your HF worse. It makes pumping more difficult for your heart. If you choose to drink alcohol, do so only in moderation.

Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medications

With heart failure, certain OTC medications (those purchased without a prescription) can make your symptoms worse. Before taking any OTC products, ask your doctor or pharmacist about:

- Antacids and cold medicines containing sodium
- Herbal supplements and vitamins
- Pain medications which can cause kidneys to retain excess sodium
- Products containing ephedra or ephedrine



Sodium (Salt) Reduction in Your Diet

With a condition such as HF, it is important to control sodium intake. Sodium causes the body to retain water, and excess water creates more work for your heart. Your doctor may limit your sodium intake depending upon your HF symptoms. Changing your eating habits can be difficult. The good news is that your taste buds adjust to less sodium over time. High-sodium foods may even begin to taste too salty.

Consider the following recommendations for managing sodium in your diet:

- Be aware that canned foods contain a high amount of sodium
- Do not add salt to food at the table or when cooking
- Pick fresh foods which are naturally low in sodium (fish, fruits, vegetables and poultry)
- Learn to use spices and herbs to enhance the taste of your food
- Add fresh lemon juice instead of salt to fish and vegetables
- Read food labels and use only no-sodium or low-sodium foods
- Use bottled water for cooking and drinking if you use a salt-filtration water softener

Fluid restriction

Daily fluid restriction may not be needed for everyone. If you have questions about this, talk with your doctor first on whether there is a need to limit your fluid intake.

Exercise Regularly

Regular exercise such as walking, swimming, golfing or jogging helps keep the heart strong, lowers anxiety, and helps control weight and blood pressure.

Reaching health and wellness goals can be hard to do on your own. We have online coaching tools available to help. A combination of guidance, support and resources will encourage you to:

- Set and manage goals
- Create a plan of care
- Track your progress
- Pursue healthy activities

To get started, log in at www.fepblue.org. Always check with your doctor before beginning an exercise routine.

Manage Stress

It is normal for HF patients to be concerned about their health. If you have concerns about your health, one of the most powerful things you can do is talk about it. Talk to your doctor, a family member or trusted friend, and always take some time to relax.

Stay Up to Date on Standard Vaccines

Bacterial infections can stress the heart. There are two shots you can receive to help lower your risk of getting sick. Ask your doctor about getting your pneumonia shots and a yearly flu shot, typically available starting in early September.

Treat Sleep Problems

Sleep disorders are common in patients with HF. Report any problems with sleep to your doctor such as excessive daytime sleepiness, loud and ongoing snoring, choking or gasping breaths, long pauses between breaths when sleeping, or dry mouth or sore throat when you wake up.

Medications for Heart Failure

Medications are a very important part of your HF treatment. Research has shown that medications can slow the disease process, prolong life and help you feel better. Always take your medications as prescribed, even if you start to feel better. Let your doctor and pharmacist know if you have any side effects from your medications. Below are some of the medications that may be used to treat heart failure.

Angiotensin Converting Enzyme (ACE) Inhibitors/Angiotensin Receptor Blockers (ARBs): Decrease blood pressure and make it easier for the heart to pump blood.

Diuretics or “water pills”: Increase water and salt removal by the kidneys and urine, decreasing swelling and shortness of breath.

Aldosterone Inhibitors: Reduce water and salt in the body, and prevent the heart muscle from stiffening and weakening.

Beta Blockers: Slow the heart rate, reduce heart rhythm problems, lower blood pressure and make the heart stronger.

Vasodilators: Relax the blood vessels and decrease the workload on the heart.

Inotropic Drugs: Increase the strength of heart pumping.

Angiotensin-Receptor Neprilysin Inhibitors (ARNIs): This medicine has two different medicines combined into one pill. It lowers blood pressure, reduces the workload on the heart and relaxes blood vessels.



I₁ Inhibitor: Slows heart rate so the heart does not have to work as hard.

SGLT2 Inhibitors: This is a medicine that is used for both diabetes and heart failure. It can help to lower the risk of hospitalization and death.

Other Treatments for Heart Failure

Rarely, a special device, like a pacemaker/defibrillator, or left ventricular assist device (LVAD), or heart transplantation, may be options for people with severe heart failure.



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