

Patient Education Sheet

Living with Heart Failure

What is Heart Failure?

Heart failure is a common condition that usually develops slowly, and means your heart is not working as well as it used to. As the heart muscle weakens it needs to work harder to keep blood moving through the body. Heart failure can be managed with medications and lifestyle changes. It begins when the heart is either damaged or weakened from conditions such as:

- High blood pressure
- Coronary artery disease
- Diabetes
- Heart muscle disease called cardiomyopathy
- Chemotherapy and radiation
- Excessive alcohol use
- Heart valve disease
- Irregular heart beat

The weakened heart muscle must work harder to keep up with the demands of the body. Your body tries to correct the effects of heart failure by:

- Retaining or holding onto salt and water to increase the amount of blood in your bloodstream.
- Increasing your heart rate in an attempt to carry more oxygen to the rest of your body.
- Increasing the size of your heart.

Eventually these attempts by the body to correct this condition make it worse.

What are the symptoms of Heart Failure?

Patients with heart failure may have some of these symptoms but not necessarily all of them.

- A weight gain of 2 pounds overnight or 5 pounds in one week
- Increased shortness of breath
- New or worsening cough
- Swelling (edema) of ankles, feet, hands, or fingers
- Waking up in the middle of the night short of breath
- Needing to add more pillows when you sleep
- Feeling bloated
- Decreased appetite
- Increased weakness and difficulty doing regular daily activities
- Changes in urination patterns: less during the day and more at night
- Chest pain
- Fast heart rate

Call your doctor if you have any changes or increase in any of the symptoms on this list.

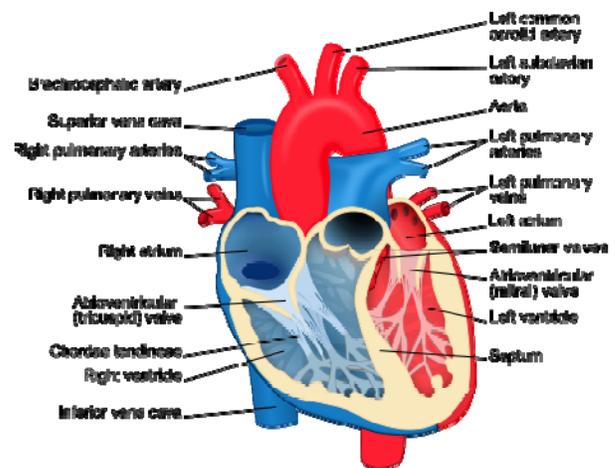
What can I do to manage symptoms?

There are many things you can do to help yourself to feel better and manage symptoms. You can take an active role in your plan of care to make healthy changes. These steps can lead to a longer life and fewer health problems. Follow these steps:

- Schedule and keep regular follow-up visits with your physicians.
- If your treatment plan includes daily weights be sure to obtain a scale that you can use if you don't have one. Weigh yourself at the same time every day. Keep an accurate log of your weight near your scale.
- Monitor and talk to your doctor about the amount of fluids you drink.
- Follow a heart healthy diet that is low in salt (sodium less than 2000 mg per day), fats and cholesterol or as directed by your physician.
- Remove the salt shaker from the table and don't add salt to food when cooking.
- Know the heart failure zones.
- Lose extra weight to make it easier for your heart to pump blood to the rest of your body.
- Take your medications as prescribed.
- Limit caffeine and alcohol intake
- Avoid tobacco products
- Develop a physical activity program with your physician
- Get the flu and pneumonia vaccines.

What are the different types of Heart Failure?

- **Systolic left heart failure:** This is failure of the heart to pump blood normally. The bottom chambers or ventricles of your heart do not empty all the blood out during contraction. The amount of blood pumped after each heart beat is called ejection fraction. It may be decreased from the normal range which is about 50-65%.
- **Diastolic left heart failure:** This is a failure of the ventricle to relax. The ventricle does not fill with blood as much as it should. It can also be described as having a "stiff" ventricle.
- **Right Heart Failure:** This is when the right side of the heart is not able to pump blood into the lung. This causes an increase of fluid in the body resulting in swelling (edema). This type of heart failure responds well to a low salt (sodium) diet.
- **Valvular Heart Failure:** This occurs when one or more valves in the heart no longer open or close correctly. Treatment depends on which valves are not working. The heart muscle itself may be normal.



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