

How to Manage Heart Failure

What is Heart Failure?

Heart failure is a disease when the heart is not able to pump blood to the rest of the body very well.

Common symptoms include: shortness of breath and tiredness, swelling in the legs, coughing or wheezing, or stomach pain and nausea. Normally, there is no cure for heart failure but getting medical treatment is very important and can help you feel better.



What Can I Do About Heart Failure?

1. At home.

Talk to your doctor about making changes in your life. Some examples are:



- Eating a healthy diet.



- Doing some type of exercise.



- Losing or maintaining your weight.



- Limiting the amount of salt in your food – it can make the body retain water.



- If you smoke, quit.



- Avoiding alcohol.

2. Learn how your heart failure medicine works.

There are three main medicines doctors use to treat heart failure:

Diuretics: Help get rid of the extra fluids that make the feet and ankles swollen.

ACE inhibitors: Relax blood vessels and makes them wider so blood can flow more easily; reduce the chances of an early death; and slow down the disease.

Beta-blockers: Protect the heart by slowing down the heartbeat; reduce the chances of an early death; and improve the person's quality of life.

Other medicines such as blood thinners can be used to prevent strokes and heart attack. They keep blood clots from forming.

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3. Understand and follow your recommended treatment.

- Get treatment for high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol, if needed.
- Some medicines can make your heart failure worse. Tell your doctor about all medicines you are taking, including over the counter medicine.
- Have an emergency plan handy and share it with your family – write the name and phone numbers of all your doctors, know who to call, what hospital to go to, what medicine to take and when, etc.

If you are taking medicine, call your doctor if you feel any of these side effects:

- Muscle cramps
- Gaining weight fast
- Having shortness of breath while resting
- Increased swelling of the legs or ankles
- Swelling of or pain in the abdomen
- Having a dry, hacking cough all the time
- Not feeling hungry
- Feeling tired all the time



Keep in Mind:

- Your doctor may prescribe one or more medicines.
- Heart failure medicine can be expensive. Ask your doctor about generic medicines or other affordable options.