

Heart Failure

Heart failure is a condition where the heart does not pump enough blood to meet the needs of the body either because it cannot fill with enough blood or cannot pump hard enough.

Risk

Heart failure can lead to a poor quality of life and make it hard to perform regular tasks.

Symptoms may include the following:

- Tiredness or fatigue. When the heart cannot pump enough blood to meet the body's demands, the body does not get the amount of oxygen it needs.
- Shortness of breath and/or dry cough. When the heart cannot pump out the proper amount of blood, it can back up into the lungs causing fluid to enter the lungs.
- Swelling: If the kidneys do not get enough blood and oxygen they cannot work as they should. As a result, the body holds on to water causing swelling.

Over time, heart failure may lead to more serious health complications including kidney failure and respiratory (lung) failure. Eventually, more serious treatment beyond medications might be needed such as a heart transplant or an implanted device that helps the heart to pump blood (left ventricular assist device or LVAD).

Medication

Heart failure is a progressive condition meaning it slowly worsens over time and there is no cure. However, early diagnosis and the right medications can slow down how quickly the disease worsens. The medicines you are prescribed can help improve your symptoms, decrease the chance of being admitted to the hospital, and prolong your life. Therefore, taking the medicines as prescribed is very important. Talk with your pharmacist about ways to remember to take your medications if you have trouble remembering to take them.

Some of the medications for heart failure are used to:

- Lower heart rate to reduce stress on the heart
- Reduce extra fluid
- Lower blood pressure to make it easier for the heart to pump blood
- Protect your kidneys



Monitoring

It is important to regularly monitor the following:

- Weight: Weigh yourself daily in the morning after you urinate and before eating. Call your provider if your weight goes up by 2 or more pounds in one day or 5 pounds in one week.
- Blood pressure
- Swelling or fluid buildup in lower body
- Trouble breathing during normal activities
- Quality of sleep
 - Multiple awakenings
 - Need to sleep upright (pillow count)

Other things you can do

Here are some helpful practices that can help decrease your heart failure symptoms:

- Eat a low sodium diet (less than 3 grams per day is recommended)
- Be physically active if you can safely do so
- If you smoke, get help to quit.
- Limit alcohol consumption because drinking too much can make your heart failure worse

Vaccines: Ask your pharmacist about important vaccines recommended for you

Starting New Medications: It is important to always check with a healthcare provider before starting any new medications or supplements even if they are over the counter and do not require a prescription. Medications such as ibuprofen (Advil) and naproxen (Aleve) can make heart failure worse.

Resources

1. American Heart Association (AHA). Heart Failure. <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/heart-failure>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Heart Failure. https://www.cdc.gov/heart-disease/about/heart-failure.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/heart_failure.htm
3. Mayo Clinic. Heart Failure. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-failure/symptoms-causes/syc-20373142>
4. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NIH). Heart Failure. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/heart-failure>