

Heart Failure



What Is Heart Failure?

Heart failure is when the heart can't pump as well as it should. Because the heart has a hard time getting blood to the rest of the body, people with heart failure can feel weak and tired. Heart failure is more common in older people, but can occur at any age. It can be caused by many different conditions. High blood pressure, diabetes, coronary artery disease and other heart problems can increase the risk for heart failure. Treating these conditions may help to prevent heart failure.



What Are the Warning Signs of Heart Failure?

- Feeling out of breath during activity or at rest
- Wheezing or coughing
- Swelling in the feet, ankles, legs, or stomach area
- Always feeling tired or having trouble with everyday activities
- Feeling full or having a sick stomach
- A feeling like the heart is racing, pounding, or not beating normally

As heart failure gets worse, the symptoms may also get worse.



How Is Heart Failure Diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history and give you a physical exam. This includes listening to your heart and lungs and checking your legs, feet and stomach for swelling. Some tests your doctor may order are:

- **Blood tests** to check for signs of heart failure
- **Chest X-rays** to check for fluid buildup or an enlarged heart
- **Electrocardiogram**, sometimes called **EKG** or **ECG**, to record your heart's rhythm and heart beats
- **Echocardiogram**, sometimes called an "echo," which uses sound waves to create a picture of your heart as it beats
- **Exercise stress test** to check for problems with your heart during exercise, while your heart is working hard



How Is Heart Failure Treated?

Heart failure can be treated. Treatment includes lifestyle changes, like eating a healthy diet, watching your weight, and taking your medicines every day. It is important to keep your regular doctor appointments. It is also important to treat other conditions that may make your heart failure worse, like high blood pressure, diabetes, or coronary artery disease. Keeping these conditions well controlled will help manage your heart failure. You may be prescribed several medicines for your heart failure. It is important to take these medicines so you can feel better.

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Questions for My Doctor

- Will I always feel tired and without energy?
- How will heart failure impact my day-to-day life?
- Can I ever be cured of heart failure? Will it go away?
- Will I have to take all of these medicines forever?
- Do I need to take all of the medicines every day or only when my symptoms feel worse?
- Can I take these medicines at the same time as my other medicines?
- How can I get help with losing weight and exercising?
- Can I keep doing the things I like to do?



Bottom Line

- Heart failure is when the heart can't pump as well as it should.
- Heart failure can cause people to feel weak and tired. Other symptoms of heart failure include: feeling out of breath, wheezing or coughing, and swelling in the feet, ankles, legs, or stomach area.
- Your doctor may order tests that will measure your heart beats, a chest x-ray, exercise stress test, or blood tests.
- Treatment for heart failure includes lifestyle changes, like eating a healthy diet and exercising. Treatment may also include different medicines. Talk to your doctor about the best treatment plan for you.

For More Information

- **ACP:** www.acponline.org/cgi-bin/cpph.cgi?CPP3009_Caring_For_Your_Heart_2014_update.pdf
- **American Heart Association:** www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartFailure/Heart-Failure_UCM_002019_SubHomePage.jsp
- **National Health, Lung, and Blood Institute:** www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Hf/HF_WhatIs.html

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