



Heart Failure

What is it?

Contrary to the way it sounds, heart failure doesn't mean that your heart has stopped beating.

Heart failure (HF) affects the way the heart works (functions) and/or its structure (anatomy), making it harder and harder for the heart to supply enough blood flow to meet your body's needs.

That's why most people with HF get short of breath. They also report not having the energy they once did. Even climbing the stairs or carrying groceries may leave you winded. But your symptoms will depend on the course of your heart failure.

There are two types of HF:

1. With systolic HF the pumping action of the heart is reduced or weakened.
2. With diastolic HF the heart's squeezing capacity is normal, but the heart can't keep the lungs from getting congested. This type is more common in older people with a long history of high blood pressure.

Three important contributors to HF are:

- Coronary artery disease
- High blood pressure
- Direct injury to the heart muscle by infections, toxins, etc.

Did You Know?

Heart failure - the heart's ability to pump enough blood through the body - affects more than 5.7 million Americans. If you have HF, you're not alone.

10 Tips for Living Well with HF

People with HF are living better and longer than ever before thanks to new therapies and earlier diagnoses. But you must take an active role in your care to stay well. Here are some tips to help:

(Many of these steps can help prevent fluid retention – when your body doesn't get rid of enough water. This can cause swelling or puffiness in your ankles and water in your lungs.)

1. **Keep an eye on the scale.** Weigh yourself each morning. If you notice that you are gaining 2 to 3 pounds in a day, let your health care provider know. This can be a sign that your body is retaining fluid, which can be a sign of worsening heart failure.



2. Limit your fluid intake. Drinking too much water or other beverages can get you into trouble. Your doctor can help you find the right balance. At each visit, he or she will check to see if you have extra fluid in your body.

“There are lots of steps people can take to control heart failure. We have everything from simple medication to heart transplantation.”
– Alfred Bove, M.D., Temple University Medical Center

3. Cut out the salt. Eating salty foods can also cause your body to retain water.

4. Check your blood pressure. Three out of four people have high blood pressure before they develop HF. If you have a home blood pressure cuff, check your pressure and report it to your doctor. He or she can provide guidance on how often to measure your pressure. Nowadays, many local drug stores and even some grocery stores offer free blood pressure machines so keep an eye out.

5. Get organized. Buy a notebook to record your weight, fluid intake, blood pressure measurements and any other concerns. Make sure to include the date for each entry and bring your notebook with you to your appointments.

6. Stay active. Studies find that moderate exercise – walking, bicycling, swimming or low impact aerobics – can help most people with HF. Physical activity is key to your heart and general health. Before getting started, talk with your doctor about the type of activities you can undertake.

7. Stick with your medication schedule. You are likely taking multiple medications to keep your HF under control. Let your doctor know if you are having trouble taking or affording them or have troublesome side effects. Never stop, skip or change the amount (dose) of medication you take without consulting your doctor first.

8. Be wary of tobacco, drugs and alcohol. Don't smoke or use illicit drugs. Because alcohol can be a direct toxin (harmful) to the heart, it's best to avoid it altogether if you have HF.

9. Get a flu shot. Influenza – the flu – can cause inflammation or swelling throughout the body and make heart disease worse. Protect yourself by getting vaccinated every flu season.

10. Keep a positive outlook. Many people with HF can feel depressed, which can make it harder for you to manage your condition. Find ways to cope by joining a support group, keeping up with hobbies, and talking openly with family and friends. Don't be afraid to seek professional help if needed.



HF is a lifelong condition, so the more informed and equipped you are to manage it, the better you'll feel. Visit www.cardiosmart.org and talk to your doctor about what you can do to protect your heart health.

Questions to Ask Your Health Team

Think about and write down questions or concerns you have before each appointment so that you don't forget. Here are some examples:

- What should I expect within the next few weeks, months and years? How is my heart failure likely to progress?
- What types of exercise are suitable for me?
- How can I best manage my fluid intake?
- Can you show me how to correctly check my blood pressure at home?
- Can you review each medication I am taking and what it is for?
- Are there side effects I should worry about? Can these be managed?

Resources

CardioSmart

www.cardiosmart.org

Heart Failure Society of America

<http://www.abouthf.org/default.htm>

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute: Heart Failure:

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Hf/HF_WhatIs.html

For more information, visit CardioSmart at www.CardioSmart.org.