

## **What Is Heart Failure?**

The heart is a muscle. It pumps oxygen-rich blood to all parts of the body. When you have heart failure, the heart can't pump as well as it should. Blood and fluid may back up into the lungs and some parts of the body do not receive enough oxygen-rich blood to work normally. These problems lead to the symptoms you feel.

## **When You Have Heart Failure**

Because of heart failure, not enough blood leaves the heart with each beat. There are two types of heart failure. Both affect the heart's ability to pump blood. You may have one or both types.

**Systolic heart failure:** The heart muscle becomes weak and enlarged. It can't pump enough blood forward when the ventricles contract. Ejection fraction is lower than normal.

**Diastolic heart failure:** The heart muscle becomes stiff. It doesn't relax normally between contractions, which keeps the ventricles from filling with blood. Ejection fraction is often in the normal range.

## **How Heart Failure Affects Your Body**

When the heart doesn't pump enough blood, hormones (body chemicals) are sent to increase the amount of work the heart does. Some hormones make the heart grow larger. Others tell the heart to pump faster. As a result, the heart may pump more blood at first, but it can't keep up with the ongoing demands. So, the heart muscle becomes more damaged. Over time, even less blood is pumped through the heart. This leads to problems throughout the body.

## **What Is Ejection Fraction?**

Ejection fraction (EF) measures how much blood the heart pumps out (ejects). This is measured to help diagnose heart failure. A healthy heart pumps at least half of the blood from the ventricles with each beat. This means a normal ejection fraction is around 50% or more.

My ejection fraction is:\_\_\_\_\_.

## **Heart Failure: Warning Signs of a Flare-Up**

Once you have a heart failure, flare-ups can happen. Below are signs that can mean your heart failure is getting worse. If you notice any of these warning signs, call your healthcare provider.

### **Swelling**

- Your ankles or lower legs get puffier.
- Your shoes feel too tight.
- Your clothes are tighter in the waist.
- You have trouble getting rings on or off your fingers.

### **Shortness of Breath**

- You have to breathe harder even when you're doing your normal activities or when you're resting.
- You wake up at night short of breath or coughing.
- You need to use more pillows or sit up to sleep.

### **Other Warning Signs**

- You feel weak, dizzy, or more tired.
- You have chest pain or changes in your heartbeat.
- You have a cough that won't go away.
- You can't remember things or don't feel like eating.

### **Tracking Your Weight**

Gaining weight is often the first warning sign that heart failure is getting worse. Gaining even a few pounds can be a sign that your body is retaining excess water and salt. Weighing yourself each day is the best way to know if you're retaining water. Your healthcare provider will show you how to track your weight. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions about calling to report weight gain.

My symptoms of a heart failure flare-up are:

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## Heart Failure: Tracking Your Weight

When you have heart failure, a sudden weight gain or a steady rise in weight is a warning sign that your body is retaining too much water or salt. This could mean your heart failure is getting worse. Weighing yourself each day is the best way to know if you're retaining water. If your weight goes up quickly, call your doctor. You will be given instructions on how to get rid of the excess water. This will help your heart work better.

**Call your doctor** if you gain 3 or more pounds in 1 day, or if you gain 5 or more pounds in 1 week. This is often a sign of worsening heart failure. Your doctor will tell you what to do next.

### Tips for Weighing Yourself

- Weigh yourself at the same time each morning, wearing the same clothes. Weigh yourself after urinating and before eating.
- Use the same scale each day. Put it on a flat, hard surface – not on a rug or carpet.
- Do not stop weighing yourself. If you forget one day, weigh again the next morning.

### How to Use Your Weight Chart

- Keep your weight chart near the scale. Write your weight on the chart as soon as you get off the scale.
- Fill in the month and the start date on the chart. Then write down your weight each day. Your chart will look like this:

Month _____ Start Date _____						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S

Month <i>August</i> Start Date <i>1</i>						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	<i>155</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>155</i>	<i>157</i>	<i>157</i>	<i>156</i>

- If you miss a day, leave the space blank. Weigh yourself the next day and write your weight in the next space.
- Take your weight chart with you when you go to see your doctor.

## Taking Medication to Control Heart Failure

Having heart failure means your heart isn't pumping enough blood. Medications can help your heart work better. But they can't do their job unless you take them exactly as directed by your doctor.

### Why Take Your Medications?

- They help you feel better. That means you can do more of the things you enjoy.
- They help your heart work better.
- They can help you stay out of the hospital.

### Know Your Medications

You may take one or more of the medications below. Be sure you know which ones you take:

- **ACE inhibitors** lower blood pressure and decrease strain on the heart. This makes it easier for the heart to pump. **Angiotensin receptor blockers** have similar effects. These are prescribed for some patients instead of ACE inhibitors.
- **Beta-blockers** help lower blood pressure and slow your heart rate. This lessens the work your heart has to do. Beta-blockers may improve the heart's pumping action over time.
- **Diuretics** ("water pills") help the body get rid of excess water. This helps prevent swelling. Having less fluid to pump means your heart doesn't have to work as hard. Some diuretics make your body lose a mineral called potassium. Your doctor will tell you if you need to take supplements or eat more foods high in potassium.
- **Digoxin** helps your heart pump with more strength. This helps your heart pump more blood with each beat. So, more oxygen-rich blood travels to the rest of the body.
- **Aldosterone antagonists** help alter hormones and decrease strain on the heart.
- **Hydralazine** and **nitrates** are two separate medications used together to treat heart failure. They may come in one "combination" pill. They lower blood pressure and decrease how hard the heart has to pump.

***Have all your prescriptions filled. Talk to a pharmacist if you have questions.***

### Tips for Taking Your Medication

- Take your medications **exactly** as directed. Follow the directions on the label.
- Take your medications at the same time or times each day.
- **If you miss a dose**, take it as soon as you remember – unless it's almost time for your next dose. If so, skip the missed dose. Do not take a double dose.
- Never change the dose or stop taking a medication unless your doctor tells you.

## Heart Failure: Making Changes to Your Diet

When you have heart failure, excess fluid is more likely to build up in your body. This makes the heart work harder to pump blood. Fluid buildup causes symptoms such as shortness of breath and edema (swelling). Controlling the amount of salt (sodium) you eat may help stop fluid from building up. Your doctor may also tell you to reduce the amount of fluid you drink.

### Read Food Labels

Your healthcare provider will tell you how much Sodium (salt) you can eat each day. Read food labels to keep track. Keep in mind that certain foods are high in salt. These include canned, frozen, and processed foods. Check the amount of sodium in each serving. Watch out for high-sodium ingredients. These include MSG (monosodium glutamate), baking soda, and sodium phosphate.

### Eating Less Salt

Give yourself time to get used to eating less salt. It may take a little while. Here are some tips to help.

- Take the salt shaker off the table. Replace it with salt-free herb mixes and spices.
- Eat fresh or plain frozen vegetables. These have much less salt than canned vegetables.
- Choose low-sodium snacks like sodium-free pretzels, crackers, or air-popped popcorn.
- Don't add salt to your food when you're cooking. Instead, season your foods with pepper, lemon, garlic or onion.
- When you eat out, ask that your food be cooked without added salt.

### If You're Told to Limit Fluid

You may need to limit fluid intake to help prevent edema. This includes anything that is liquid at room temperature, such as ice cream and soup. If your doctor tells you to limit fluid, try these tips:

- Measure drinks in a measuring cup before you drink them. This will help you meet daily goals.
- Chill drinks to make them more refreshing.
- Suck on frozen lemon wedges to quench thirst.
- Only drink when you're thirsty.
- Chew sugarless gum or suck on hard candy to keep your mouth moist.

I will make the following diet changes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Heart Failure: Being Active

Being active doesn't mean that you have to wear yourself out. Even a little movement each day helps to strengthen your heart. If you can't get out to exercise, you can do simple stretching and strengthening exercises at home.

### Ideas to Get You Started

- Add a little movement to things you do now. Walk to mail letters. Park your car at the far end of the parking lot and walk to the store.
- Choose activities you enjoy. You might walk, swim or ride an exercise bike. Things like gardening and washing the car count, too.
- Join a group exercise program at a YMCA or YWCA, a senior center, or a community center. Or look into a hospital cardiac rehabilitation program.

### Tips to Keep You Going

- Get up and get dressed each day. You'll feel more like being active.
- Make a plan. Choose one or more activities that you enjoy and that you can easily do. Then plan to do at least one each day. You might write your plan on a calendar.
- Go with a friend or a group if you like company. This can help you stay motivated, too.

### For Your Safety

- Exercise indoors when it's too hot or too cold outside, or when the air quality is poor. Try walking at a shopping mall.
- Wear socks and sturdy shoes.
- Always warm up your muscles by gently stretching first.
- Start slowly. Do a few minutes several times a day at first. Increase your time and speed little by little.
- Stop and rest whenever you feel tired or get short of breath.
- Don't push yourself on days when you don't feel well.

My exercise plan is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Tips for Quitting Smoking

Quitting smoking is a gift to yourself, one of the best things you can do to keep your heart disease from getting worse. Smoking reduces oxygen flow to your heart, speeds the buildup of plaque, and increases your risk for heart attack. Quitting helps reduce smoking's harmful effects. You may have tried to quit before, but don't give up. Try again. Many smokers try four or five times before they succeed.

### Line Up Help

- Ask for the support of your family and friends.
- Join a quit-smoking class
- Ask your doctor about nicotine replacement products and prescription medications that can help you quit.

### Set a Quit Date

- Choose a date within the next 2-4 weeks.
- After picking a day, mark it in bold letters on a calendar.

***You'll have the best chance of success if you join a stop-smoking group and have the support of family and friends.***

### Set Limits

- Limit where you can smoke. Pick one room or a porch, and smoke only in that place.
- Make smoking outdoors a house rule. Other smokers won't tempt you as much.
- Hang a list of "quit benefits" in the spot where you smoke. Put one on the refrigerator and one on your car dashboard.

### Your Limit List

Start by giving up cigarettes at the times you least need them. Write down a few more ideas.

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## Coping with Heart Failure

It's normal to feel sad or down at times when you're living with heart failure. Some medications can also affect your mood. Following your treatment plan may seem like a lot to remember. If you feel overwhelmed, just focus on one day at a time. Don't be afraid to ask others for help when you need it.

### Walk to Feel Better

Try not to withdraw from family and friends, even if you are finding it hard to talk to them. They can still be a good source of support. To feel better, you can also:

- Spend time doing things you enjoy. This may include participating in a favorite hobby, meditating, praying or spending time with people you care about.
- Share what you learn about heart failure with the people in your life. Invite family members along when you visit your healthcare provider.
- Think about joining a support group for people with heart failure. It may be easier to talk to people who know firsthand what you're going through. They can offer advice and share stories. You may want to ask loved ones to join you for a meeting.

### Asking for Help

Having heart failure doesn't mean that you have to feel bad all the time. Consider talking to your healthcare provider or a therapist if:

- You feel worthless or helpless, or are thinking about suicide. These are warning signs of depression. Treatment can help you feel better. When depression is under control, your overall health may also improve.
- You feel anxious about what will happen to you or your loved ones if your health gets worse. Taking care of legal arrangements, such as living and durable power of attorney, can help you feel more secure about you and your loved ones' futures.

## Lifestyle Instructions for Heart Failure

The term “heart failure” sounds scary. But it doesn’t mean that your heart will suddenly stop or that you are near death. It means the heart is not doing its job as well as it should. Heart failure happens when your heart muscle cannot keep up with your body’s need for blood flow. Symptoms of heart failure can be controlled by changes in your lifestyle and by following your doctor’s advice.

### Home Care

- Work hard to remove the salt from your diet.
  - Limit canned, dried, packaged, and fast foods.
  - Don’t add salt to your food at the table.
  - Season foods with herbs instead of salt when you cook.
- Ask your doctor about an exercise program. You can benefit from simple activities such as walking or gardening. Don’t be discouraged if your progress is slow at first.
- Break the smoking habit. Enroll in a stop-smoking program to improve your chances of success.
- Weigh yourself every day. Do this at the same time of day and in the same kind of clothes. See below for instructions on when to call your doctor about weight gain.
- Rest as needed.
- Recognize that your health and even survival depend on your following medical recommendations.
- Avoid exposure to temperature extremes, such as hot tubs and saunas.
- Take your medications exactly as prescribed. Don’t skip doses. If you miss a dose of your medication, take it as soon as you remember – unless it’s almost time for your next dose. In that case, just wait and take your next dose at the normal time. Don’t take a double dose.

### Follow-Up

Keep appointments for checkups and lab tests that are needed to check your medications and condition.

### When to Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following signs of worsening heart failure:

- Sudden weight gain (3 or more pounds in one day or 5 or more pounds in one week)
- Trouble breathing not related to being active
- New or increased swelling of your legs or ankles
- Swelling or pain in your abdomen
- Breathing trouble at night (waking up short of breath, needing more pillows to breathe)
- Frequent coughing that doesn’t go away
- Feeling much more tired than usual

## **Heart Failure Quiz**

### ***Do you know how to manage your heart failure?***

- 1) **Reasons:** Why did you develop the heart failure symptoms that brought you into the hospital? What do you need to do to avoid another hospitalization?
- 2) **Weights:** What is the procedure for weighing yourself every day? What change in weight would make you call your doctor?
- 3) **Symptoms:** What are other symptoms of heart failure and what would you do if you develop them?
- 4) **Emergencies:** What are potentially life-threatening symptoms that require a call to 9-1-1?
- 5) **Diet Changes:** What do you need to limit in your diet? What changes will you make?
- 6) **Smoker:** For smokers, when is your quit date? What support do you have to help you?
- 7) **Follow-up:** When is your follow-up appointment? How will you get there?
- 8) **Exercise:** What is your exercise/activity/work plan when you return home?
- 9) **Medications:** Name your medications and the reason for taking them.

### **Further Information:**

**National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute**

[www.nhlbi.org](http://www.nhlbi.org)

**Heart Failure Society of America**

<http://www.hfsa.org/patient/>

**For Smokers:**

[www.quitnet.com](http://www.quitnet.com)

**American Heart Association**

[www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)