

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MANAGEMENT OF HEART FAILURE IN HOSPITALIZED PATIENTS

What Is Heart Failure?

Your heart is one of the most important organs in your body. It is a strong muscle about the size of your fist that pumps oxygen-rich blood throughout your body. Heart failure doesn't mean your heart has stopped working; it means your heart doesn't pump as well as it should and your body doesn't get enough of the blood it needs to work well. At times, you may need to be hospitalized for sudden worsening of this condition so that more advanced treatments can be administered.

What Are the Risk Factors for Hospitalization for Heart Failure?

You are at higher risk for being hospitalized for heart failure if you:

- Have a heart attack, an electrical problem, or another injury to your heart
- Experience sudden changes in thyroid function
- Do not take your medications as prescribed
- Are not careful about your dietary intake (especially salt intake)
- Develop a heart infection called endocarditis

What Are the Symptoms of Heart Failure?

- Feeling weak or tired
- Feeling short of breath when lying flat
- Swollen feet and ankles
- Unexplained weight gain
- Inability to perform exercise without breathlessness

What Will Happen in the Hospital?

- Your doctor will perform a physical examination and ask you questions about your medical history and symptoms to determine the cause of the worsening of your heart failure.
- You will have an echocardiogram, a safe, painless procedure that uses sound waves to see what your heart looks like and how it functions.
- Your doctor will perform or refer you for other tests.

How Is Heart Failure Treated?

Heart failure is a serious health condition, but treatment can make you feel better and live longer.

Modification of the following risk factors can help:

- Don't smoke cigarettes.
- If you have overweight, lose weight.
- If you drink alcohol heavily, reduce the amount you drink.
- If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, or coronary artery disease, make sure those conditions are treated.



Other beneficial lifestyle changes may include the following:

- It's important to check your weight often. A lot of weight gain in a few days or weight gain every day for more than a few days can mean that heart failure is getting worse.

- People with heart failure may need a low-salt diet. Ask your doctor.

Several medications are used to treat heart failure, including:

- Beta-blockers: These medicines help slow your heart rate and reduce your blood pressure. This can help your heart work better.

- Angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors (ACEis): These medicines help lower your blood pressure and help improve your shortness of breath. This helps your heart work better.

- Angiotensin-receptor blockers (ARBs): These medicines provide many of the same benefits as ACEis.

- Hydralazine and nitrates: These medicines can be used for people who can't use ACEis or ARBs. Sometimes they are added to ACEis or ARBs.

- Angiotensin receptor-neprilysin inhibitors: These medicines help blood flow and fluid retention and help your heart work better.

- Sodium-glucose cotransporter-2 inhibitors: These medicines block specific hormones in your body and allow for your heart to function better.

A device or implant may also be used in treatment of heart failure. This might include a pacemaker to make your heart beat regularly or an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator to restart your heart automatically if it stops beating.

Questions for My Doctor

- What type of heart failure do I have?
- Do I need to lose weight?
- What physical activities are good for me?
- Which medicines will I be taking for my heart failure, and what do they do?
- What changes in my condition should prompt me to call the office?
- If I'm doing well, when should I come back to see you?

For More Information



American College of Physicians
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MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/heartfailure.html>

American Heart Association

www.heart.org