

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HEART FAILURE

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

What Is Heart Failure?

Your heart is a strong muscle about the size of your fist. It pumps oxygen-rich blood throughout the body. Heart failure doesn't mean your heart has stopped working; it means that it doesn't pump as well as it should, and your body doesn't get enough of the blood it needs to work well.

What Are the Risk Factors?

You are at higher risk for heart failure if you:

- Have high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart disease
- Are overweight
- Smoke cigarettes
- Have a family history of heart failure
- Drink alcohol heavily

What Are the Symptoms?

- Feeling weak or tired
- Feeling short of breath when lying flat
- Swollen feet and ankles
- Unexplained weight gain

How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will perform a physical exam and ask you questions about your medical history and symptoms.
- 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 It Treated?

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

Modification of risk factors

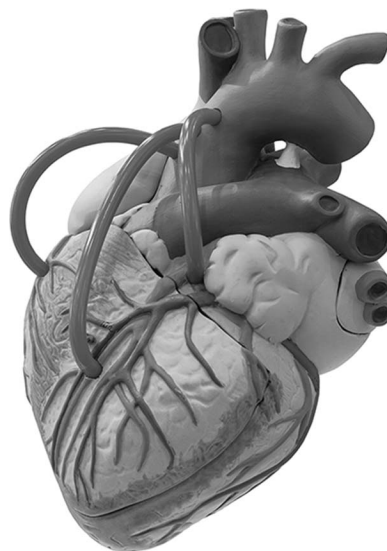
- Don't smoke cigarettes.
- If you're overweight, lose weight.
- If you drink alcohol heavily, reduce the amount you drink.
- If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, or coronary artery disease, make sure those conditions are treated.

Other lifestyle changes

- 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.

Medications

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



- *Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors*. 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 ACE inhibitors.
 - *Hydralazine and nitrates*. These medicines can be used for people who can't use ACE inhibitors or ARBs. Sometimes they are added to ACE inhibitors or ARBs.
 - *Angiotensin receptor-neprilysin inhibitors*. These medicines help blood flow and fluid retention and help your heart work better.
- Devices or implants
- These 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 Your 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 make me 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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American College of Physicians

www.acponline.org/patient_ed/cardiovascular

MedlinePlus

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

American Heart Association

www.heart.org