

## Eating Less Salt

Too much salt (sodium) leads to fluid buildup in some people. This can worsen heart failure. Your HCP may tell you to limit your salt intake to no more than 1,500 mg a day. To reduce how much salt you eat, try the tips below.



### How to Cut Back on Salt

- Use low-salt recipes. Get a low-salt cookbook. Or look for recipes online.
- Don't add salt to food when you're cooking. Season foods with pepper, lemon, garlic, and onion instead.
- Take the saltshaker off the table.
- Read labels before buying packaged foods. Check the serving size and number of milligrams of sodium in each serving.
- Also check food labels for high-sodium ingredients. These include monosodium glutamate (MSG), brine, sodium chloride, and baking soda.

## Limit These High-Sodium Foods

- Canned vegetables and soups
- Cheese
- Cured meats (such as ham or bacon)
- Fast-food burgers
- French fries
- Deli meats
- Mustard and ketchup
- Pickled foods
- Potato chips
- Relish and sauerkraut
- Salted crackers, nuts, or pretzels
- Soy sauce

### Drink Less Fluid

You may be advised to drink less fluid to help prevent your body from storing too much water. If you need to limit fluid intake, your HCP will tell you how much you can have each day. The following tips can help you keep your mouth moist and stay within daily fluid goals:

- Pour drinks with a measuring cup. This will help you keep track of how much fluid you're drinking.
- Suck on ice cubes or ice chips.
- Drink from a small glass and only when you're thirsty.
- Chill drinks to make them more refreshing.
- If your mouth is dry, rinse it with water and then spit the water out.
- Chew sugar free gum or suck on sugar free hard candy. This helps increase the flow of saliva so your mouth stays moist.



## Staying Active

You may think that having heart failure means that you can't be very active. But this isn't true. Exercise can help strengthen your heart and improve symptoms. Your HCP can advise you on how active you should be.

### Getting Started

- Choose aerobic exercises, such as walking, biking, or swimming.
- If your HCP says it's okay, do strengthening exercises, such as lifting light weights or using stretch bands.
- Pace yourself when being active. If you're too short of breath to speak a full sentence, you're pushing yourself too hard.
- Join a cardiac rehabilitation (rehab) program. Rehab staff can teach you how to exercise safely. You'll also learn more about steps you can take to keep your heart healthy. Ask your HCP if you qualify.

### Symptoms of Overexertion

Stop exercising and call your HCP if you have any of these symptoms:

- Tightness or pain in your chest, neck, jaw, shoulders, arms, or back (Call 911!)
- Lightheadedness, dizziness, or confusion
- Shortness of breath that is worse than usual
- A racing or skipping heartbeat
- Extreme tiredness



# What Is Heart Failure?

When you have heart failure, it doesn't mean that your heart has stopped working. It just means that your heart isn't pumping as well as it should. Heart failure is a chronic condition. This means it can't be cured. But with help from your **healthcare provider (HCP)** and the right treatment, heart failure *can* be managed. You can take steps to live well and feel better. This guide can help you get started.

## Causes of Heart Failure

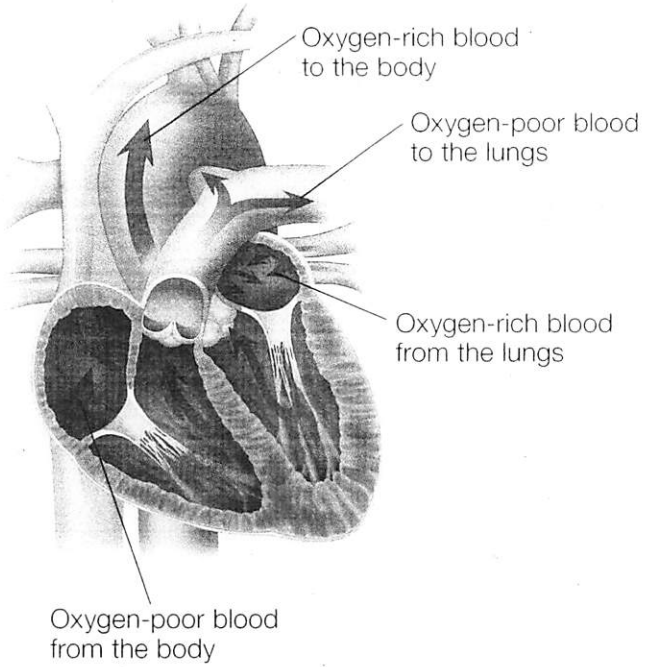
When heart failure occurs, it is often due to another health problem. Problems that can lead to heart failure include:

- Heart disease
- Past heart attack
- High blood pressure
- Heart valve disease
- Heart muscle disease
- Heart rhythm problems
- Heart problems that are present at birth or inherited
- Infection of the heart valves or muscle



## How a Healthy Heart Pumps Blood

The heart is a muscle. With each beat, it must pump out enough blood to keep the body healthy. The right side of the heart receives oxygen-poor blood from the body and sends it to the lungs. The lungs add oxygen to that blood. Oxygen-rich blood then flows to the left side of the heart. The left side pumps this blood out to the rest of the body.



## Types of Heart Failure

There are two main types of heart failure. You can have one or both types.

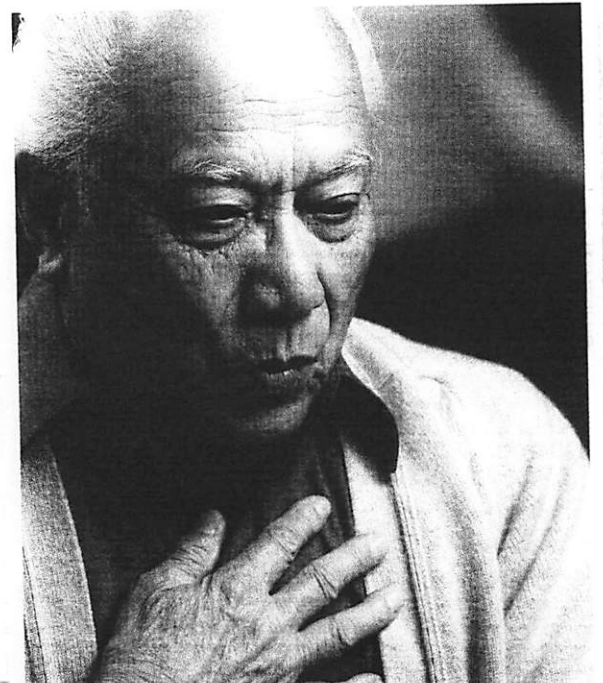
- With **systolic heart failure**, the heart muscle becomes weak and enlarged. It doesn't pump enough blood forward to the lungs and body.
- With **diastolic heart failure**, the heart muscle becomes stiff. It doesn't relax normally between heartbeats, so less blood fills the heart.

## Effects of Heart Failure

A weakened or stiffened heart muscle moves less blood with each pump. As a result, fluid may back up in the lungs and other parts of the body. Less blood moving through the body also means that your organs get less oxygen. These problems can lead to the symptoms you feel.

## Common Symptoms

- Shortness of breath, wheezing, or coughing when you exert yourself
- Problems breathing when lying flat or the need to sleep propped on pillows
- Waking up at night coughing or short of breath
- Rapid weight gain
- Swelling in the hands, abdomen, ankles, or feet
- Feeling weak or tired after little effort
- Feeling dizzy or faint



## Diagnosis and Treatment

To find out if you have heart failure, your HCP will examine you, ask questions, and run tests. Using the results, you and your HCP can then plan treatment.

## Health History and Exam

You'll be asked about your symptoms and any health problems you have. You'll also have a physical exam. For this, your HCP will listen to your heart and breathing. He or she will also check for signs of heart failure, such as swelling in the hands, abdomen, ankles, or feet.

## Tests You May Have

Your HCP may order tests to learn more about your heart. These will likely include blood tests and a chest x-ray. You may also have an **echocardiogram**. This test uses sound waves to form live pictures of your heart. An **electrocardiogram (ECG)** may also be done. This helps check if there is a problem with your heart rate or rhythm. It can also help detect areas of damage to the heart muscle.

## Making Your Treatment Plan

There are many treatments for heart failure. Your HCP will discuss all of the options with you and help you form the best treatment plan for your needs. But keep in mind that *you* play the most important role in your treatment plan. For best results, stay involved in your care and follow your plan as best you can. More information about specific treatments can be found in the next sections of this guide.

## Taking Medications

Medications may be prescribed to treat heart failure and other health problems that you have. Some medications help the heart pump better. Others help relieve symptoms. Your HCP can explain how your medications work and how to take them.

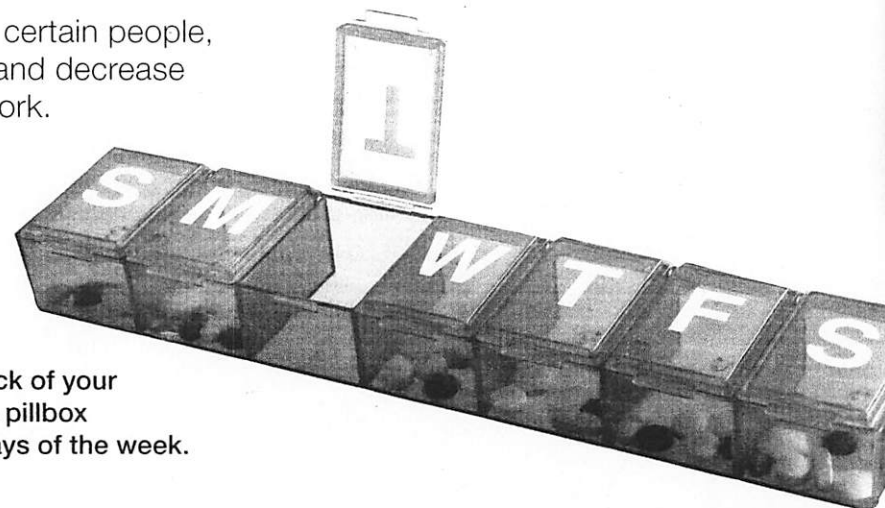
### Medications You May Take

- **ACE inhibitors.** These decrease strain on the heart and lower blood pressure. This helps the heart pump better and also improves blood flow.
- **Angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs).** These work differently from ACE inhibitors, but have similar effects. They may be used instead of an ACE inhibitor.
- **Beta-blockers.** These slow the heart rate and lower blood pressure.
- **Diuretics.** These help rid the body of excess fluid. This may reduce swelling and improve breathing.
- **Aldosterone antagonists.** These help block the effects of a hormone that can make heart failure worse. They may be prescribed for advanced heart failure.
- **Hydralazine and nitrate.** In certain people, these lower blood pressure and decrease how hard the heart has to work.

## Tips for Taking Medications

For your health and safety, be sure to take medications exactly as prescribed. Below are some tips to help you use medications correctly.

- Know what each medication does and when and how to take it.
- Don't stop taking medications or change the dosage without talking to your HCP first.
- Tell your HCP if you have side effects that bother you.
- Keep a list of all the medications you take. Show the list to any HCP you visit. Update the list as often as needed.
- Don't split or skip your pills to save money. Talk to your HCP if you're having trouble paying for your medication. He or she may be able to refer you to resources that can help.
- Refill prescriptions before they run out. Order more pills when you still have a week's supply left. Or work with your pharmacy to set up automatic refills.



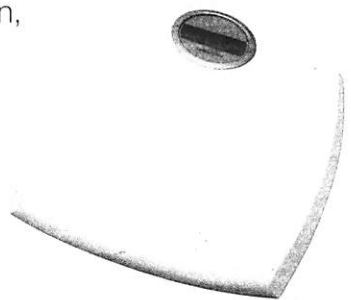
▶▶ To help keep track of your medications, use a pillbox marked with the days of the week.

## Monitoring Symptoms

A key way to manage heart failure is to watch daily for changes in your symptoms. That way, you can take action quickly if you notice a symptom getting worse. Your HCP can help you form an action plan for what to do when specific symptoms worsen.

## Keep Track of Your Weight

Rapid weight gain may mean that your body is storing too much water. This may be a sign that your heart failure is getting worse. To help detect if your body is storing water, weigh yourself each day. Then write down the result in a log. **Call your HCP** if you gain more than 2 pounds in 1 day or more than 5 pounds in 1 week. If you receive other instructions for reporting weight gain, follow them as directed. Your HCP may also ask you to track your blood pressure and heart rate daily.



## Signs and Symptoms of Worsening Heart Failure

Call your HCP right away if you notice any of these signs or symptoms:

- Rapid weight gain (see above)
- New or increased swelling in your hands, abdomen, ankles, or feet
- Shortness of breath that is worse than usual
- Coughing that doesn't go away
- Feeling much more tired than usual



## Coping with Your Emotions

Heart failure doesn't only affect your body—it can also affect your emotions. Learning as much as you can about your condition can help you stay positive and feel more in control. The advice below may also help you feel better and stay connected to loved ones.

### Ways to Feel Better

- **Keep doing the things you enjoy**, such as favorite hobbies. Staying busy with the things you like to do can improve your mood. It can also make life more enjoyable.
- **Reach out to friends and family.** They can listen, offer advice, and be good sources of support.
- **Join a support group for people with heart failure.** It may be easier to talk to people who know firsthand what you're going through.

### If You Have Depression

Depression is common in people with chronic conditions such as heart failure. Tell your HCP if you feel sad on most days or lose interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy. These are symptoms of depression. Know that depression is a medical problem and it's not your fault. Treatments, such as counseling and medications, can help you get better.

Also available in Spanish

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