

How Can I Live With Heart Failure?

About 6.7 million Americans are currently living with heart failure. In fact, it's one of the most common reasons people 65 and older go into the hospital.

Heart failure is a long-term (chronic) condition, but it can be treated. Getting good medical care and following your treatment plan will help you have the best quality of life.

You can help by taking your medications as prescribed and following your eating and exercise plans.



Following your health care professional's advice and taking your medications as directed are important steps to managing your heart failure.

What lifestyle changes will I need to make?

It's important to monitor your symptoms and make lifestyle changes to help you manage your heart failure.

You'll need to:

- Follow a heart-healthy diet that's low in saturated fat, sodium and added sugars and avoid trans fats.
- Limit your fluid intake.
- Monitor your blood pressure and know your numbers. Your health care professional will recommend the blood pressure level and treatment plan for you.
- Monitor your heart rate.
- Monitor your weight daily and watch for sudden weight gain.
- Manage anemia and iron deficiency if you have been diagnosed with it.
- Take steps to improve the quality of your sleep by:
 - Raising the head of the bed or using a wedge to sleep at an incline.
 - Treating sleep apnea by using a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine.
 - Changing the time you take your diuretics to reduce bathroom trips during the night.

- Get regular, moderate-intensity physical activity. Talk to your health care professional about an exercise plan that will work for you.

What medication might I take?

The goal of heart failure treatment is to help you live a longer, better-quality life. Treating the causes of heart failure with medication can lessen tiredness (fatigue), shortness of breath and swelling. It also helps improve your energy level so you can be physically active.

Some examples of medications that may be prescribed include:

1. **ACEi** (angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors) and **ARBs** (angiotensin receptor blockers) lower blood pressure and relax blood vessels so that the heart can easily pump blood to the body.
2. **ARNIs** (angiotensin-receptor neprilysin inhibitors) improve artery opening and blood flow, reduce sodium (salt) retention and decrease strain on the heart.
3. **Beta-blockers** may lower blood pressure, slow the heart rate and make it easier for the heart to pump blood.

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4. **Mineralocorticoid receptor antagonists (MRA)** are a type of diuretic that helps eliminate extra salt and fluid.
5. **SGLTi (sodium-glucose cotransporter inhibitors)** are diabetes medications that lower blood sugar but also treat heart failure in patients with or without diabetes.
6. **Digoxin** slows down the heart rate and may make the heart squeeze harder.
7. **Diuretics** help your body get rid of extra water and sodium to reduce the buildup of fluid in the lungs, ankles, legs and abdomen.
8. **Ivabradine (pacemaker channel inhibitor)** slows down the heart rate, similar to beta blockers.
9. **Hydralazine (with or without nitrate)** relaxes and widens blood vessels, lowers blood pressure and makes it easier for the heart to pump blood.
10. **Vericiguat** relaxes and widens blood vessels, lowers blood pressure and makes it easier for the heart to pump blood.

What else can I do?

Cardiac rehabilitation can be an important step in the journey to recovery and wellness for people with heart

failure. Cardiac rehab is a medically supervised program that includes exercise training, education on heart-healthy living and often counseling to reduce stress. For many people with heart failure, cardiac rehab plays a critical role in improving the quality and length of life.

What should I watch out for?

Call your health care professional right away if you:

- Gain 3 or more pounds in a day
- See swelling in your feet, ankles or other parts of your body
- Are having a hard time breathing
- Can't do what you could do the day before
- Get a fever
- Have chest pain

Other ways to tell that your heart might not be working the way it should include:

- Coughing up pinkish, blood-tinged mucus
- Confusion, difficulty thinking, dizziness or lightheadedness
- Changes in your eating habits or appetite

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

How can my family help me?

What types of physical activity should I do?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.