



10 Things You Should Know About Heart Failure

Heart failure is a very serious condition in which the heart is no longer able to pump blood effectively to deliver enough oxygen to the rest of the body. This lack of oxygen-rich blood causes symptoms to occur throughout the body. Heart failure is also known as congestive heart failure (CHF) and cardiomyopathy.

It is important that heart failure patients receive care by cardiologists who have received specialized training in caring for people with this condition, and have access to the most advanced treatments, including clinical trials for experimental therapies.

If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with heart failure, this guide will help you better understand the condition and what can be done to treat it.

Now that you have your guide, how about taking one more step?

Call us for a consultation at 858-263-0668.



1. Heart failure affects more than 5 million people in the U.S. It is most common among people age 65 and older, but it can affect anyone regardless of age. The leading causes of heart failure include coronary artery disease, high blood pressure, heart attack and diabetes. Family history may play a role, as can lifestyle choices, such as smoking or a poor diet.

2. There are two main types of heart failure. **Systolic heart failure**, which is most common, occurs when the left lower chamber of the heart cannot pump blood properly. **Diastolic heart failure** is when the left upper chamber cannot properly fill with oxygen-rich blood. Advanced or end-stage heart failure occurs when the heart's pumping capacity is severely decreased.

3. Left unchecked, heart failure can exist for years before symptoms develop. Common symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath
- Swollen feet or ankles
- Nausea
- Chronic coughing or wheezing
- Fatigue or lightheadedness
- High heart rate

People who have more than one of these symptoms should see a physician.

4. The heart's pumping capacity is known as "ejection fraction." A normal ejection fraction is more than 55 percent; a lower ejection fraction can indicate a reduced ability to pump the same amount of blood compared to a healthy heart.

5. Physicians can use a number of tests to diagnose heart failure, including:

- Medical history and physical exam
- Electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG) to record the heart's electrical functions
- Stress EKG, a physical test typically involving a treadmill, to detect reduced blood flow to the heart
- Chest X-ray to view the heart, lungs and major blood vessels
- Echocardiogram (ECHO) to create moving pictures of the heart
- Cardiac catheterization to check the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart



6. When diagnosed early and treated successfully, heart failure can be managed, and possibly even reversed in some cases. This requires patients to make significant lifestyle changes, such as quitting smoking, losing weight, eating a heart-healthy diet, avoiding alcohol and caffeine, exercising regularly and reducing stress.

7. If it is not severe, heart failure may be treated with prescription medications that can help reduce the workload on the heart, slow the heart rate, lower blood pressure or widen blood vessels, or reduce fluid build-up in the body. Depending on your individual needs, your doctor may prescribe more than one medication.



8. Patients with advanced or end-stage heart failure who are not helped by medication may benefit from other treatments, including mechanical devices to help the heart pump blood to the body. These may include:
 - **Cardiac resynchronization therapy (CRT)** to increase the heart's pumping efficiency
 - **Implantable cardiac defibrillator (ICD)** to keep the heart beating at a healthy rate
 - **Pacemaker** implantation to provide a healthy heart beat and rhythm
 - **Ventricular assist devices (VADs)**, including left ventricular assist devices (LVADs) that improve the circulation of oxygen-rich blood to organs
 - **Transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR)**, a minimally invasive procedure that doesn't require a traditional chest incision and open surgery
 - **Heart valve repair or replacement**, a minimally invasive surgery
 - **Angioplasty and stent placement** to open blocked or narrowed arteries and restore healthy blood flow
 - **Coronary bypass surgery** to bypass a blocked coronary artery and restore healthy blood flow
 - **Heart transplant** to replace a damaged heart
9. Cardiac rehabilitation programs can help people recover more quickly from surgical procedures, and help patients make necessary lifestyle changes to prevent repeat heart problems. In addition, these programs can promote weight loss, lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and reduce stress.
10. Clinical trials offer the opportunity to try new treatments for heart failure before they are widely available, and enable you to participate in medical research that provides greater understanding of heart disease. If you are interested in participating in clinical trials, ask your physician about your options.

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