Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What is the stage and level of my heart failure?
- What is my ejection fraction?
- What changes should I make to my diet and fluid intake?
- What activities can I do?
- Are there medications I can take to help me feel better?
- What treatment options are available for me with the risks and benefits of each option?
- What should I do to monitor my heart failure at home and with my doctor?
- What signs should I look for to let me know when to call my doctor?

Contact Us

If you would like to receive support or need more information, please contact us at:

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Living Longer with Heart Disease

Managing and Monitoring Heart Failure
“Heart failure” can be a scary term. When people learn that they have heart failure, they’re often afraid that their heart may suddenly quit working. While a heart failure diagnosis does mean that the heart is not pumping well, if treated, many patients can live enjoyable lives.

About 6.2 million people in the U.S. are living with heart failure today. Heart failure is when the heart can't get enough blood to the body because the heart muscle has either weakened, and its ability to pump is reduced, or has stiffened, and cannot relax enough to fill with blood, or both.

Heart failure can affect your daily life because you may experience symptoms such as:
- Shortness of breath
- Swelling in your legs, ankles and feet
- Weight gain
- Feeling very tired or weak
- A cough that will not go away
- Being unable to exercise or do normal activities like walking up stairs
- Increased heart rate
- Lack of appetite or nausea

**What is Heart Failure**

**Diagnosing Heart Failure**

Patients who have symptoms of heart failure should be seen by a doctor. The doctor will do a physical exam and is also likely to order an echocardiogram which will show images of blood pumping through the heart and what the heart’s ejection fraction is.

**Treating Heart Failure**

Even though there is no cure for heart failure, it can often be treated with medications, devices, and changes in diet and exercise. In some cases, a patient may need medical intervention and a pacemaker, ICD or left ventricular assist device (LVAD) may be implanted.

**Living with Heart Failure**

Many patients are able to lead happy, healthy lives after being diagnosed with heart failure. Here is some advice from heart failure patients themselves:

1. Exercise. "Exercise makes a huge difference, even when it feels impossible. Walk outside, if possible, to make you feel more positive."
3. Eat healthy. "Try to reduce sodium and eat more healthy foods. Follow fluid restrictions, but find ways to still enjoy what you are eating."
4. Take medication exactly as you were told. "It is very important to take medication so you feel better and live longer. If you have questions, call your doctor."
5. Educate yourself. "You will feel more confident making decisions and taking care of yourself if you learn about your heart disease. Only use reliable sources."

**Monitoring Heart Failure**

It is important to monitor heart failure, especially fluid build up in the lungs and body, which can cause complications and hospitalizations. Heart failure can be monitored by your cardiologist through listening to your heart and lungs, blood tests, chest x-rays, EKGs, echocardiograms and other tests. You might also be asked to monitor your weight at home to see if there is a big increase that could indicate fluid buildup.

Today, there are some newer devices that monitor heart failure. One implantable device is placed in the heart during cardiac catheterization and can monitor how your heart pumps, heart pressure and fluid levels. This implantable device can keep heart failure patients out of the hospital by alerting patients when adjustments in medications, fluid intake, and sodium intake are needed before the situation gets serious. Another new monitoring system that can be done in a physician’s office monitors fluid quickly and accurately through a vest that can be worn over clothes.

If you are living with heart failure, ask your doctor about in-home monitoring technology that can help you track your fluid levels.

Ejection fraction is the percentage of blood that is pumped out with each heartbeat. The heart never empties all the blood from the lower chambers (ventricles), so a normal ejection fraction at rest is between 55% and 70%.