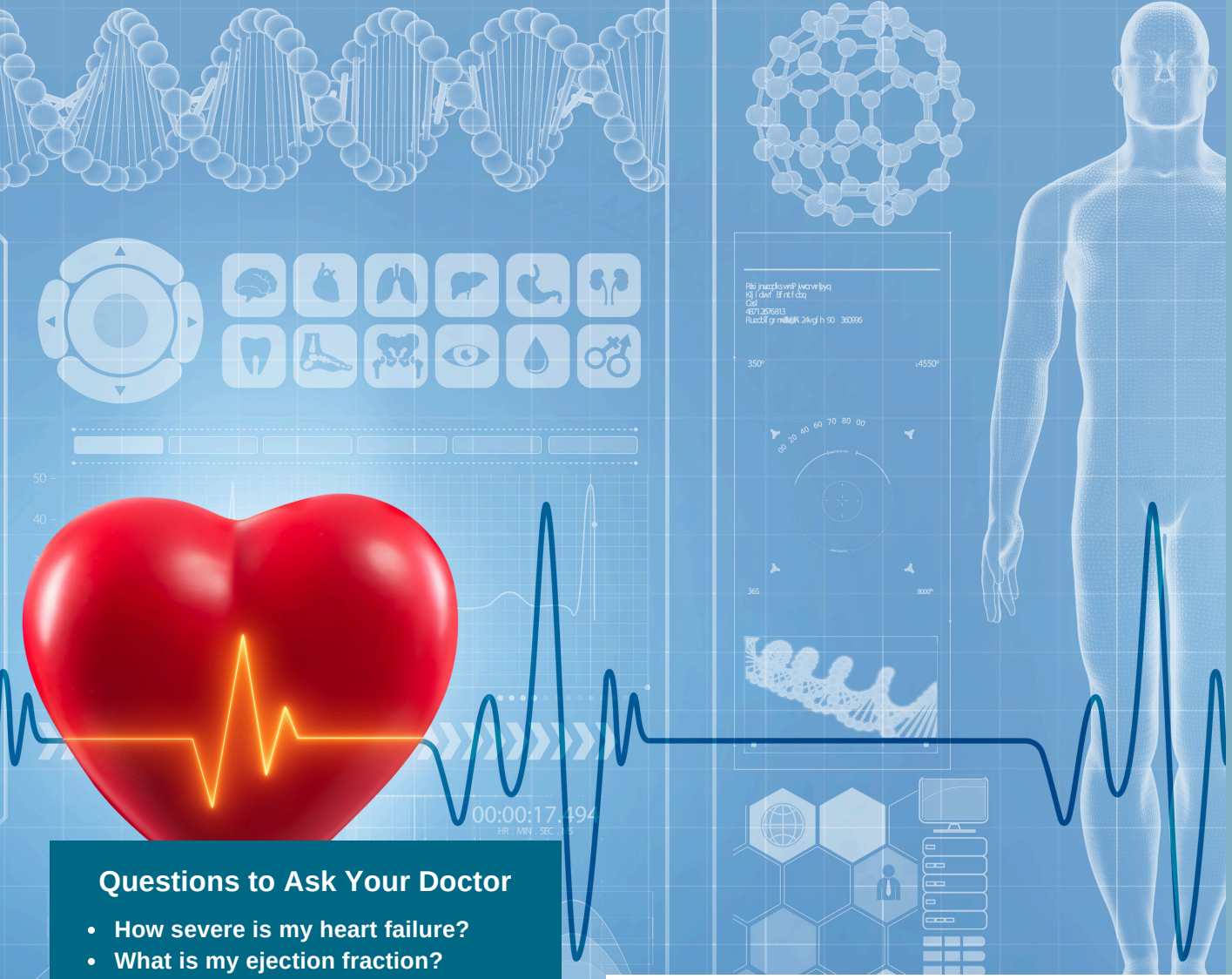

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- How severe is my heart failure?
- What is my ejection fraction?
- What tests do I need?
- 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 risks and benefits of each option?
- What should I do to monitor my heart failure?
- How can I monitor at home?
- What signs should I look for that mean I should call my doctor? 911?

Living with Heart Failure

Mended Hearts®

Contact Us

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

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EMPOWERHEARTFAILURE™

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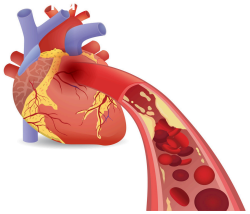
Living Longer with Cardiovascular Disease

Discussion Guide for Patients & Caregivers

What is Heart Failure?

Heart failure sounds scary, but it does not mean your heart will suddenly fail. However, it does mean that your heart is not pumping well. When someone has heart failure, their heart muscle has become weak or stiff and has difficulty pumping blood to the body.



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

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 other tests like 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 a pacemaker, ICD or a left ventricular assist device (LVAD). Heart transplant may be needed in severe cases of heart failure.

Monitoring Heart Failure

Monitoring heart failure can help keep patients out of the hospital and feeling better. If you have heart failure, your doctor will tell you how to monitor it between visits, especially fluid buildup in the lungs and body which can cause symptoms and lead to complications and hospitalization.

Here are ways you can monitor your heart failure:

- **Go to medical appointments.** Your heart doctor can examine you and do any needed tests, like chest x-rays, EKGs, echocardiograms, and blood tests, to see how you are doing.
- **Monitor at home.** You might be asked to monitor things at home like your weight, symptoms, and blood pressure. Ask your doctor how.
- **Monitor with devices.** 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 patients out of the hospital by alerting them when changes are needed to medications, fluid intake, and sodium intake before the situation gets serious.

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

Living with Heart Failure

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

Tips from Patients

- **Exercise**. "Exercise makes a huge difference, even when it feels impossible. Walk outside, if you can, to make you feel more positive."
- **Don't stay home.** "Go to church. Go to the mall. Join a support group. Go bowling or golfing. Walk. Volunteer."
- **Eat healthy**. "Try to reduce sodium and eat more healthy foods. Follow fluid restrictions, but find ways to still enjoy what you are eating."
- **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."
- **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."