

Heart Failure Facts & Information



What Is Heart Failure (HF)?

HF is a condition in which the heart can't pump enough blood to meet the body's needs - it either can't fill with enough blood, or it can't pump blood to the rest of the body with enough force. Certain conditions, such as narrowed arteries in your heart (coronary artery disease), diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity, gradually may leave your heart too weak or stiff to fill and pump efficiently.

Risk Factors

About 5.7 million Americans have heart failure and the number is growing. HF is more common in:

65+

People who are over 65. Aging can weaken the heart muscle. Older people also may have had diseases for many years that led to HF.



People who have had a heart attack. Damage to the heart muscle from a heart attack can weaken the heart muscle.



People who are overweight. Excess weight puts strain on the heart and increases your risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes which can lead to HF.



Kids who have congenital heart defects, which occur if the heart, heart valves, or blood vessels near the heart don't form correctly while a baby is in the womb.

Warning Signs & Symptoms



Shortness of breath or trouble breathing



Fatigue (tiredness)



Swelling in the ankles, feet, legs, abdomen



Cough that produces blood-tinged mucus

All of these symptoms are the result of fluid buildup in your body. When symptoms start, you may feel tired and short of breath after routine physical effort, like climbing stairs. Fluid buildup from HF also causes weight gain, frequent urination, and a cough that's worse at night and when you're lying down.

Diagnosis

Your doctor will diagnose heart failure based on your medical and family histories, a physical exam, and test results



Medical & Family Histories

Your doctor will ask whether you or others in your family have or have had a disease or condition that can cause heart failure.



Physical Exam

During the physical exam, your doctor will listen to your heart for sounds that aren't normal, listen to your lungs for the sounds of extra fluid buildup, look for swelling in your ankles, feet, legs, abdomen.



Diagnostic Tests

An electrocardiogram, or ECG, is the first test to be performed. Further details are gathered by taking images of the heart using X-rays, CT, MRI or nuclear technology. Other tests may include stress testing and arrhythmias test.

Diet & Nutrition Tips for People with Heart Failure

There are some dietary changes that can help with symptom management and progression of the disease:



Eating lots of fruits and vegetables



Choosing lean proteins like skinless chicken and fish when possible



Limiting sodium intake to 1,500 mg daily



Choosing low-fat milk and other dairy products



Choosing whole-grain and high-fiber foods



Lowering alcohol consumption



Lowering consumption of sugar and saturated fats



Quit smoking

Control of Fluid Consumption

Though it is vitally important to stay hydrated, excess water can put unnecessary stress on an already compromised heart. If the doctor recommends limiting fluid intake, there are a few ways to simplify this process:



Space out liquids intake throughout the day. Smaller & frequent servings can help.



Sugar-free chewing gum & hard candies can provide relief without drinking.



Swishing with water and then spitting it out can also help.



Use a marked container in the fridge that holds the exact daily fluid allowance.

Remember that fluids don't just consist of beverages like water, juice and soft drinks. Anything that melts or contains a large amount of liquid, like ice cream, popsicles, soup and even gelatin (!!!) counts toward the daily fluid intake.

Sources:

<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/heart-failure>

<https://www.agingcare.com/articles/caring-for-a-loved-one-with-heart-failure-207455.htm>

<https://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/guide/understanding-heart-disease-treatment#1>