

Title: Living with Heart Failure

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Abstract: Heart failure is a common condition that affects more than 5 million people in the US. While the condition has no cure, there are several steps you can take including medication, diet, and exercise to control this condition and live longer. Also understanding warning signs and when to contact your physician can help in maintaining your health and preventing dangerous situations.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Primary Care Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

Understanding and Living with Heart Failure

General Information

Q: What is heart failure?

A: Heart failure is a condition that causes the heart to weaken over time and pump less blood to the body.

Q: What causes heart failure?

A: There are many causes of heart failure including diabetes, high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, and alcohol use. Many other diseases or conditions can make it worse and your doctor can tell you if you have any of these.

Q: Is heart failure common?

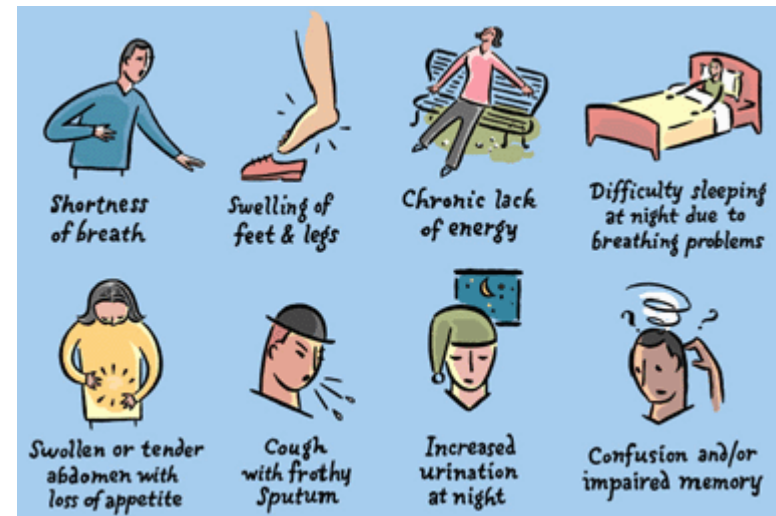
A: It is a very common condition with more than 5 million Americans living with heart failure. Know that you are not alone and many other people are living happily with the help of their doctor and healthy living. Many people have a normal life and still enjoy doing things they used to do.



Symptoms

Q: What are the symptoms of heart failure?

A: There are several symptoms that patients see with heart failure. Trouble breathing with activity or at rest, swelling in the legs or feet, coughing, stomach pains, weakness, being tired, and weight gain can all be seen.



All of the above are symptoms of heart failure you can experience

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Q: Are there warning signs for my heart failure getting worse?

A: Yes, and being aware of these can help in stopping it from worsening. If you have sudden weight gain, a change in how hard it is to breathe, or more swelling than normal in your feet or hands all mean the heart failure may be increasing and you should visit your doctor. Early help with these problems will help keep you out of the hospital.

Q: What other things can I do?

A: Be an active participant in your care. Talk with your doctor to understand the best ways to make changes to your lifestyle. Keep track of your symptoms and tell your doctor of any changes. Making these changes can be difficult and continuing to make goals and dealing with these challenges can go a long way to keeping you as healthy as possible.

Treatment

Q: How is heart failure treated?

A: There are several ways to treat heart failure. Doctors will use medicines to make your heart beat stronger and to treat other conditions that can make heart failure worse. There are also healthy habits including stopping smoking and drinking, exercise, healthy eating, and losing weight.

Q: What kinds of diets are best for heart failure?

A: A healthy eating plan includes a diet low in fats, cholesterol, and salt. Also eating a well balanced meal with fruits and vegetables will help to keep you healthy. An example of a good diet plan is the DASH diet which your doctor or a dietician can talk to you about.

Websites for more information on heart failure

American Heart Association: www.americanheart.org

Heart Failure Online: www.heartfailure.org

Mayo Clinic: www.mayoclinic.org

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Primary Care Clerkship – Patient Education Tool