

UNDERSTANDING HEART FAILURE

A PATIENT GUIDE

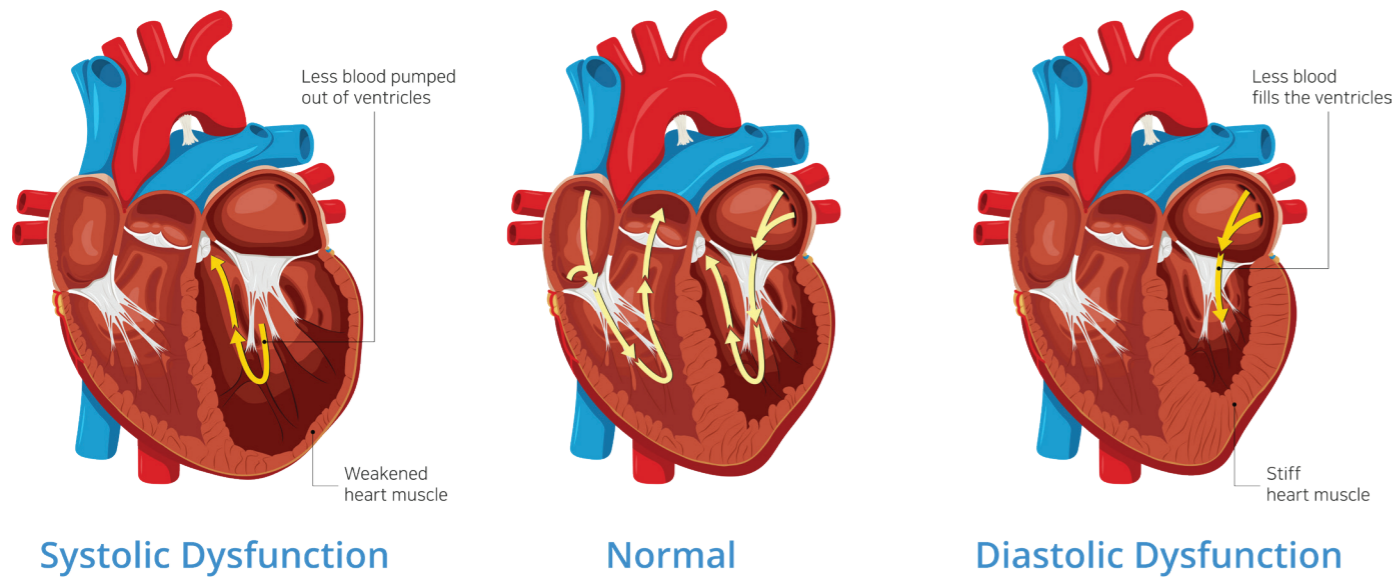
OVERVIEW

The term heart failure can sound like your heart has stopped working. But the term refers to a structural or functional abnormality of the heart. Often it is a term used when your heart can't pump blood to the rest of your body as well as it should.

This brochure will help you understand a diagnosis of heart failure.

WHAT IS HEART FAILURE?

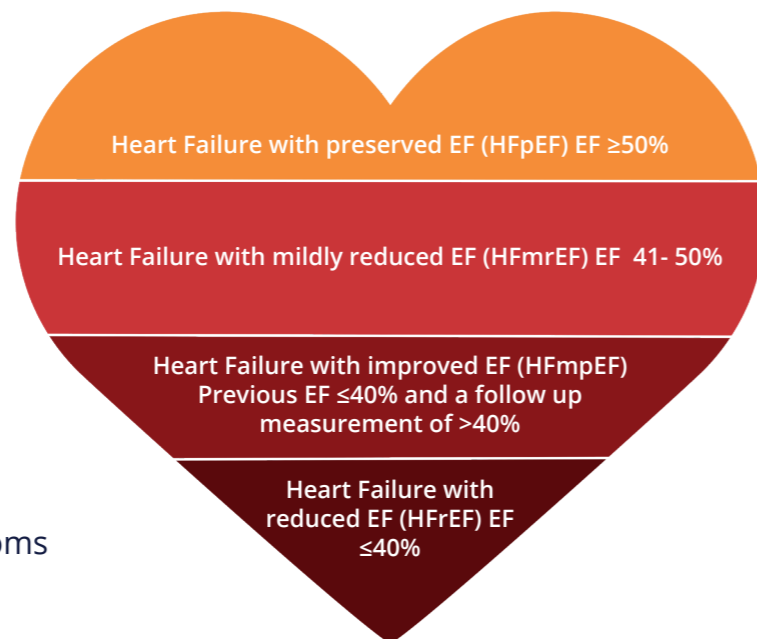
- The heart is a muscle that pumps blood throughout the body
- Heart failure means that your heart does not pump blood around the body properly because the heart has become enlarged, weak, or stiff.



The term 'Ejection Fraction' (EF) is used to measure how much blood your heart pumps out with each heartbeat. It is measured as a percentage. This is a key measurement when diagnosing HF.

It is important to remember that while Ejection Fraction is a key measurement when diagnosing heart failure, how you feel and what symptoms you have is also as important.

Heart failure (HF) is generally categorised into two types depending on what symptoms you have and what your EF measures.



There are many conditions that can damage the heart muscle including:

- Coronary artery disease.
- Heart attack.
- Cardiomyopathy.
- Heart issues present at birth (congenital heart disease).
- Diabetes.
- High blood pressure
- Arrhythmia (abnormal heart rhythms, including atrial fibrillation).
- Kidney disease.
- Having obesity.


Other causes that may contribute to heart muscle damage are cigarette smoking, non-prescribed drug use and alcohol intake.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF HEART FAILURE

HOW HEART FAILURE CAN MAKE YOU FEEL

When your heart is not pumping properly, less blood is going to your body's important organs, and this can make you feel tired and dizzy. People with heart failure may experience a shortness of breath or they feel puffed after a small amount of effort.

Other symptoms you may experience or signs that you may see are:

			
Breathlessness	Chest Pain	Tiredness	Palpitations
			
Not being able to walk far (when you usually can) or do activities you used to do easily	Sometimes you may find it hard to breathe lying down or trying to sleep	Heart failure can cause fluid build-up around the body, resulting in swelling in the ankles, legs, or stomach	Coughing / Dizziness

HEART FAILURE DIAGNOSIS

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms that are not usual for you. It is important that you tell your doctor what symptoms you have been experiencing. They will do a physical examination and may send you to a cardiologist for some tests to diagnose heart failure or another illness.

Tests that may be conducted include:

ECG (Electrocardiogram)

This measures the electrical activity that causes the heart to beat. An ECG may detect conditions that can cause heart failure, such as an abnormal heart rhythm or a heart attack

Echocardiogram (echo):

A test that uses sound waves to create a moving picture of the heart. The picture is much more detailed than a plain x-ray image

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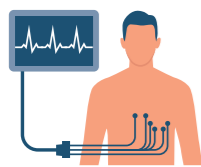
Blood tests

Blood tests can be used to learn more about your condition. Tests are done to:

- Help diagnose the cause for and monitor heart failure.
- Identify risk factors for heart disease.
- Look for problems that may make your heart failure worse.
- Monitor side effects of medicines you may be taking.

Chest X-Ray

If you have already been diagnosed with heart failure, you may have a chest x-ray if your symptoms suddenly become worse to check if there is fluid in the lungs.



ELECTROCARDIOGRAM



ECHOCARDIOGRAM



BLOOD TEST



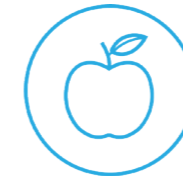
CHEST X-RAY

TREATMENT & MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

For most people heart failure is a life-long condition. There are treatments that can help alleviate symptoms and slow the progress of heart failure. Treatment includes a combination of changes to your diet and lifestyle, medicines and sometimes a device to protect your heart from abnormal heart rhythms.

DIET & LIFESTYLE

Through your diet and lifestyle there are things you can do to help treat your heart failure:



Have a healthy diet

A healthy balanced diet can improve your symptoms and general health



Maintain a healthy weight

If you are overweight, this is a major risk factor for the development of heart failure



Decrease your salt intake

Salt makes the body retain fluid, cutting back on salt is recommended for heart failure.



Alcohol intake

Alcohol can cause more damage to your heart. Talk to your nurse, doctor, or health worker about how much you can have.



Exercise regularly

If your symptoms allow, exercising most days of the week can help to improve your cardiovascular fitness & strengthen your muscles.

As a result, this can improve symptoms like shortness of breath and fatigue, which are common in people with HF.



Smoking

Smoking has many heart health related risks. If you have heart failure, you must consider quitting smoking to ensure your heart is not damaged any further.

Remember: Always check with your GP first before beginning any exercise regime.

MEDICATIONS FOR YOUR HEART FAILURE

Most people with heart failure will require medications. Heart failure medications unfortunately cannot cure heart failure, but they can make you feel better, relieve some of the symptoms of heart failure, may keep you out of hospital, and may help you live longer.

Your doctor will likely recommend a few different types of medications. They all work in different ways to help your heart and are all important for treating heart failure. It is important for you to take your medications every day, and exactly as they are prescribed.

The medications you are prescribed may vary depending on the type of heart failure you have and the symptoms you are experiencing. Your doctor or nurse may also change the dose especially in the first few months to make sure you are getting the best benefit possible.

MEDICATIONS YOU MAY HAVE BEEN PRESCRIBED

- ARNI, ACE Inhibitor or ARB – these all widen the blood vessels and lower blood pressure making it easier for your heart to pump.
- Beta Blocker – these can slow your heart rate and lower your blood pressure.
- Aldosterone antagonists/ Mineralocorticoid receptor blockers
- An SGLT2 inhibitor
- Diuretics – helps alleviate swelling and excess fluid

Angiotensin receptor-neprilysin inhibitor (ARNI) or angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitor (ACEI) or angiotensin receptor blockers(ARB)

Entresto is an ARNI, and will be prescribed to many people with HF. Some examples of ACEIs include perindopril and ramipril. Some examples of ARBs include valsartan or candesartan.

These medications make it easier for your heart to pump, help relax the blood vessels, and can help to reduce fluid build-up in the body.

Beta-blockers:

These medications can reduce the workload of the heart, and make it work better, by pumping more slowly. Some common beta-blockers prescribed for heart failure include bisoprolol, nebivolol, carvedilol, and metoprolol XL.

Aldosterone antagonists/Mineralocorticoid receptor blockers:

This includes spironolactone and eplerenone. These medications can help to stop the body from retaining excess fluid build-up and makes it easier for the heart to function.

SGLT2 inhibitors:

Empagliflozin and dapagliflozin are examples of this medication.

These medications block a protein in the kidneys, which leads to a change in filtration in the body. This can lead to less strain on the heart and reduces the amount of work the heart has to do to pump blood around your body.

Diuretics:

Diuretics are sometimes, but not always needed in heart failure. They will be prescribed to you if your doctor or nurse notices that you have extra fluid build-up. Diuretics help the body to get rid of excess fluid, which makes it easier for your heart to pump.

HEART RHYTHM TREATMENT

In some people with heart failure and especially if you have a low ejection fraction, an abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmia) develops. Some abnormal heart rhythms are treated with medications.

If you have a condition that can cause an abnormal heart rhythm, your doctor might recommend a device that can shock the heart and return it to a normal rhythm.

There are different types of devices.

Implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD)

An ICD is a small battery-powered box that is inserted under the skin on your chest. Thin wires connect the ICD to the heart. The ICD continuously monitors your heart and can correct dangerous abnormal heart rhythms by delivering controlled electric 'shocks'.

Pacemakers

A pacemaker is a small implantable device that electrically stimulates the heart to maintain a regular heart rhythm. They are located under the skin on your chest and has wires attaching it to the heart.

They are sometimes used in heart failure patients to help reduce symptoms when the left and right side of the heart are out of sync and don't beat together. This is called Cardiac Resynchronisation Therapy or CRT device and can be combined with an implantable cardioverter defibrillator.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF WHEN YOU HAVE HEART FAILURE

Being diagnosed with heart failure can be frightening and stressful. It is important that you take care of yourself. The checklist below will help you to manage your condition the best way possible.

- Take your medicines as instructed by your doctor
- Tell your doctor or nurse if you are having side effects from your medications.
- Pay attention to how you feel and look for signs that your heart failure is getting worse.
- Seek help by dialling 000 if you have any of the following:
 - Severe shortness of breath
 - Chest pain
 - Fainting or passing out
- Call your doctor or nurse if you develop any of the following, (that can be a sign of worsening heart failure):
 - Increasing or new shortness of breath
 - New or a worse cough
 - Increase in leg or ankle swelling
 - Weight gain of 2kg or more in a 2-day period
 - A fast or irregular heartbeat.

If you have any queries regarding any of this information, please contact the Heart of Melbourne Specialist Heart Failure Clinic on:

Phone: 1300 122 888

Email: contact@hom.com.au

Website: www.hom.com.au



heart of melbourne
SPECIALIST HEART FAILURE CLINIC