Manage your heart failure

Although there is no cure for heart failure, it can be treated and managed. The following practices can help you stay healthy and out of the hospital:

• Eat a low-salt, heart-healthy diet
• Exercise regularly
• Change your lifestyle
  - Quit smoking
  - Limit or avoid alcohol
  - Weigh yourself daily
  - Keep track of your symptoms
  - Avoid stress
• Take your medications

Take heart—we’re on your side

It is up to you to talk to your healthcare professional and ask questions about heart failure if you think you have any of the signs or symptoms. Know that help is available.

AAHFN is a national nonprofit organization committed to advancing heart failure practices through nursing education, patient awareness and research. Visit AAHFN at www.aahfn.org.

Could you have heart failure?

Know your risk.

Heart failure is a serious health condition. More than 5 million people in the U.S. suffer from heart failure, yet many Americans are unaware of their risk.
What is heart failure?
Heart failure is a serious illness in which your heart doesn’t pump blood through your body as well as it should. Your heart still beats, but it pumps less nutrient- and oxygen-rich blood to the rest of your body. Because of this, you may feel tired or weak. Heart failure also can cause fluid buildup in your organs and tissues, leading to swelling in your legs and feet, or congestion in your lungs, leading to increased breathing difficulties.

Heart failure is very common
Heart failure affects more than 5 million people in the U.S., and 550,000 new cases are diagnosed each year. It is the most common cause of hospitalization in people older than 65 years of age.

What causes heart failure?
Anything that weakens the heart and prevents it from pumping blood normally can cause heart failure. Common causes of heart failure include:
- Coronary artery disease or clogged arteries
- Previous heart attack
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Heart valve disease or heart valve damage
- Infection of the heart muscle
- Abnormal heart rhythms
- Alcohol abuse or heavy drinking

Stages of heart failure
Heart failure is described in two ways, by “stages,” that reflect the degree of your overall condition, and by New York Heart Association (NYHA) “functional classes” that reflect the degree that your symptoms limit your ability to carry out activities.

As damage to your heart muscle worsens, your heart failure stage advances from A to D based on many factors, including your medical treatment and how well you take control of and manage your heart failure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Pre-Heart Failure</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Pre-Heart Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Structural heart disease, no heart failure symptoms</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Prior or current heart failure symptoms</td>
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Pay attention to warning signs and symptoms
Many people with heart failure are not aware that they have it. Although signs and symptoms may not appear to be serious, they should not be ignored.

The following signs and symptoms could signal heart failure. If you have any of these for more than a week, call your doctor to have a check-up. You could have heart failure or another condition that may be treated with proper medical management.
- Shortness of breath that keeps you from finishing a sentence or that causes you to stop activities prematurely or makes you want to rest after activity
- Fatigue that is unusual or excessive
- Swelling in the feet, ankles, legs, or fingers
- An unexpected increase in weight
- Frequent coughing
- Irregular heart rate (pulse) or racing heart
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Chest pain or tightness, or pain in your jaw, neck, shoulders, or arms