

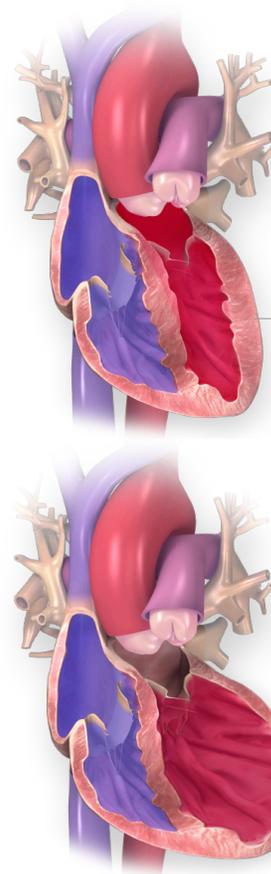


## What is Heart Failure?

If you have heart failure, you're not alone. About 6 million Americans are currently living with it. In fact, it's one of the most common reasons people age 65 and older go into the hospital. It can take years for heart failure to develop.

Heart failure symptoms usually develop over time as your heart becomes weaker and less able to pump the blood that your body needs. Heart failure usually results in an enlarged heart (left ventricle).

Heart failure is a serious long-term (chronic) condition. But you can live a full, active life with the right medical treatment and attention to your lifestyle.



**The normal heart** has strong muscular walls that contract to pump blood out to all parts of the body.

Heart muscle pumps blood out of the left ventricle.

**Heart failure** is a condition that causes the muscle in the heart wall to slowly weaken and enlarge, preventing the heart from pumping enough blood.

Weakened muscle prevents left ventricle from pumping enough blood.

### Does your heart stop?

When you have heart failure, it doesn't mean that your heart has stopped beating. It means that your heart isn't pumping enough blood. The heart keeps working, but the body's need for blood and oxygen isn't being met.

Heart failure can get worse if it's not treated. The best thing you can do is follow your health care professional's instructions and make any needed changes in diet, physical activity and lifestyle. This will help you have the best possible quality of life.

### What can happen?

- Your heart does not pump enough blood.
- Blood backs up in your veins.
- Fluid builds up in your body, causing swelling in your feet, ankles and legs. This is called "edema."
- Fluid builds up in your lungs. This is called "pulmonary edema."
- Your body doesn't get enough blood, food and oxygen.

### What are the signs of heart failure?

- Shortness of breath, especially when lying down
- Tired, run-down feeling (fatigue)
- Coughing or wheezing, especially when you exercise or lie down
- Swelling in feet, ankles and legs
- Weight gain from fluid buildup
- Confusion or can't think clearly
- Dizziness or lightheadedness

### What are the causes?

The two most common causes of heart failure in the U.S. are high blood pressure and coronary artery disease (CAD). CAD occurs when arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become narrowed by buildups of fatty deposits called plaque.

(continued)



Other common risk factors that lead to heart failure are:

- Being overweight or obese
- Type 2 diabetes
- Smoking
- High cholesterol
- Metabolic syndrome
- Sleep apnea
- Alcohol or drug abuse

Other conditions that can cause heart failure include:

- Past heart attack that has done some damage to the heart muscle
- Heart defects present since birth
- Heart valve disease
- Diseases of the heart muscle
- Infection of the heart and/or heart valves
- Abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmias)

### How is it treated?

- You may be given medication to strengthen your heart and water pills to help your body get rid of excess fluids.

- Your health care professional will recommend a low-sodium (salt) diet.
- You may be provided oxygen for use at home.
- You may need to make certain lifestyle changes.
- Surgery or cardiac devices may be needed.

### What can I do to manage my heart failure?

- Follow your health care professional's advice.
- Quit smoking, if you smoke.
- Take your medications exactly as prescribed.
- Weigh yourself daily to watch for sudden weight gain.
- Track your daily fluid intake.
- Monitor your blood pressure daily.
- Lose or maintain your weight based on your doctor's recommendations.
- Avoid or limit alcohol and caffeine.
- Follow a heart-healthy diet.
- Reduce your sodium (salt) intake.
- Be physically active.
- Get adequate rest.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit [heart.org](https://www.heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at [HeartInsight.org](https://www.heartinsight.org).
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/SupportNetwork](https://www.heart.org/SupportNetwork).

### Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

**What medications will I need to take?**

**How much weight gain is too much?**

## MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/AnswersByHeart](https://www.heart.org/AnswersByHeart) to learn more.