

Heart Failure: What You Need to Know

A HEARTLIFE PATIENT & CAREGIVER GUIDE



WHAT IS HEART FAILURE?

Heart failure (HF) is a condition where the heart does not pump blood effectively, making it harder for your body to get the oxygen and nutrients it needs. This can lead to symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath, and swelling in the legs, ankles, or feet. While heart failure is a serious condition, with the right treatment and lifestyle changes, many people live well with it.



RECOGNIZING THE SYMPTOMS

- **Shortness of breath** – especially during activity or when lying down
- **Fatigue** – feeling more tired than usual, even after resting
- **Swelling** – in the legs, ankles, feet, or stomach due to fluid buildup
- **Rapid heartbeat** – a racing or irregular heartbeat
- **Sudden weight gain** – an increase of 2–3 lbs in a day or 5 lbs in a week due to fluid retention



HOW IS HEART FAILURE DIAGNOSED?

Doctors use various tests to confirm heart failure, including:

- **NT-proBNP Blood Test:** Measures a hormone released by the heart when under stress. Higher levels indicate heart failure.
- **Echocardiogram (Echo):** An ultrasound of the heart to check how well it pumps blood.
- **Electrocardiogram (ECG/EKG):** Checks heart rhythm and electrical activity.
- **Stress Test:** Monitors heart function during physical activity.



WHY EARLY DIAGNOSIS MATTERS

Detecting heart failure early helps prevent serious complications like hospitalizations or worsening symptoms. Regular check-ups and knowing your risk factors can help with early diagnosis.

RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Coronary artery disease
- Family history of heart failure
- Obesity or an inactive lifestyle

HEART FAILURE IS MANAGEABLE WITH THE RIGHT CARE PLAN. TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER AND ASK:

What stage of heart failure do I have?

Are there lifestyle changes I should make?

What medications are best for me?

How can I monitor my symptoms at home?

Treatment Options for Heart Failure

MEDICATIONS

- **ACE Inhibitors / ARBs / ARNIs:** Help relax blood vessels, making it easier for the heart to pump.
- **Beta-blockers:** Slow the heart rate and improve function.
- **Mineralocorticoid Receptor Antagonists (MRAs):** Help reduce fluid buildup and prevent further heart damage (e.g., Spironolactone, Eplerenone).
- **Diuretics (Water Pills):** Reduce fluid buildup to relieve swelling and breathing problems.
- **SGLT2 Inhibitors:** Newer medications that improve outcomes, even in people without diabetes.

LIFESTYLE TIPS

- **Eat a heart-healthy diet** – reduce salt, avoid processed foods, and focus on fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins.
- **Stay active** – gentle activities like walking can strengthen the heart.
- **Monitor symptoms daily** – track weight, swelling, and breathing to detect changes early.
- **Quit smoking and limit alcohol** – reduces strain on the heart.

PRACTICE SELF-CARE:

- Prioritize your physical health by eating well, being active, and getting enough sleep.
- Engage in activities you enjoy to reduce stress and recharge.
- Seek counseling and join HeartLife's support groups to share experiences and gain emotional support.



Take Action Today!

Advocating for your heart health starts with understanding heart disease and other conditions that affect your cardiovascular system. Learn your numbers, follow your care plan, and work closely with your healthcare team. Small, consistent steps can make a big difference for your long-term heart health.



HEARTLIFE ACADEMY

For more information on heart failure and other support please visit us at heartlife.ca/academy/



HeartLife FOUNDATION

Canada's patient-led heart disease charity
"It's About Life, Not Failure™"



join us at heartlife.ca

Our Mission

The HeartLife Foundation is a patient-driven charity whose mission is to transform the quality of life for people living with cardiovascular diseases by engaging, educating, and empowering a global community. We aim to create lasting solutions, drive innovation, and build healthier lives for patients, caregivers, and families worldwide.