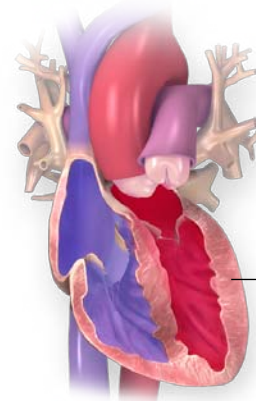




# What is Heart Failure?

If you have heart failure, you're not alone. About 5.7 million Americans are living with it today. 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 is called congestive heart failure when fluid builds up in various parts of the body. So if you don't yet have it but are at risk for it, you should make lifestyle changes now to prevent it!

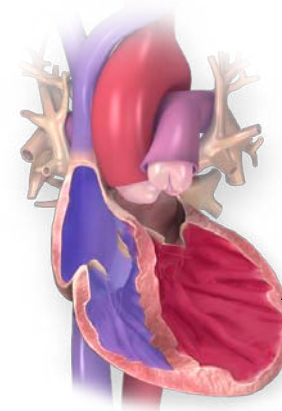
Heart failure symptoms usually develop over time as your heart becomes weaker and less able to pump the blood that your body needs. Heart failure usually results in an enlarged heart (left ventricle).



## The Normal Heart

has strong muscular walls which 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 blood as it should. 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. It's very important to do what your doctor tells you to do. When you make healthy changes, you can feel a lot better and enjoy life much more!

## 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 does not get enough blood, food and oxygen.

## What are the signs of heart failure?

- Shortness of breath, especially when lying down
- Tired, run-down feeling
- 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

## What are the causes?

The most common cause of heart failure is coronary artery disease (CAD). CAD occurs when arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become narrowed by buildups of fatty deposits called plaque.

Other common risk factors that lead to heart failure are:

- Past heart attack has done some damage to the heart muscle
- Heart defects present since birth

(continued)



- High blood pressure
- Heart valve disease
- Diseases of the heart muscle
- Infection of the heart and/or heart valves
- Abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmias)
- Being overweight
- Diabetes
- Thyroid problems
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Certain types of chemotherapy

### How is it treated?

- Your doctor may give you medicine to strengthen your heart and water pills to help your body get rid of excess fluids.
- Your doctor will recommend a low-sodium (salt) diet.
- You may be provided oxygen for use at home.
- Your doctor may recommend certain lifestyle changes.
- Surgery or cardiac devices may be needed, in some cases.

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

- Follow your doctor's advice.
- Quit smoking, if you smoke.
- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed.
- Weigh daily to check for weight gain caused by increased fluid.
- 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.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet that's low in sodium, saturated fat and *trans* fat.
- Eat less salt and salty foods.
- 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** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

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

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**How much salt may I eat?**

**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, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.