

# HEART FAILURE

Heart failure is a condition where the heart isn't able to pump blood as well as it should. This means your body doesn't get enough oxygen and nutrients, which can make you feel tired and short of breath. Everyday activities like walking or climbing stairs might become difficult. Sometimes, fluid can build up in your legs, ankles, or lungs, causing swelling and making it hard to breathe. Heart failure is caused by several conditions that damage or overwork the heart. While heart failure is a serious condition, many people can manage it with medications, lifestyle changes, and support from healthcare providers and loved ones.

## Causes

**Coronary Artery Disease (CAD):** This is the most common cause. CAD occurs when the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle become narrowed or blocked by fatty deposits, reducing blood flow to the heart.

**High Blood Pressure (Hypertension):** Over time, high blood pressure can make the heart work harder than normal, which can weaken the heart muscle.

**Heart Attack:** A heart attack can damage the heart muscle, reducing its ability to pump blood effectively.

**Cardiomyopathy:** This refers to diseases of the heart muscle. It can be caused by various factors, including genetic conditions, chronic alcohol use, and infections.

**Heart Valve Problems:** If the heart valves don't open or close properly, the heart has to work harder to pump blood, which can lead to heart failure.

**Diabetes:** High blood sugar levels can damage the blood vessels and nerves that control the heart.

**Lifestyle Factors:** Smoking, obesity, a diet high in fat and cholesterol, and lack of physical activity can all contribute to heart failure by increasing the risk of heart disease.

Managing these risk factors through lifestyle changes and medical treatment can help prevent or manage heart failure.

## Diagnosis

**Medical History and Physical Exam:** Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms, medical history, and risk factors like high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, or diabetes. They will listen to your heart and lungs and check for signs of fluid buildup in your legs and abdomen.

**Blood Tests:** These can help identify conditions that affect the heart and measure levels of certain proteins that indicate heart failure.

**Chest X-ray:** This can show the size and shape of your heart and detect fluid in your lungs.

**Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG):** This test records the electrical activity of your heart to detect abnormalities.

**Echocardiogram:** This ultrasound test creates images of your heart to assess its structure and function.

**Stress Test:** This measures how your heart performs under physical stress, often using a treadmill or stationery bike.

Cardiac MRI or CT scan: These imaging tests provide detailed pictures of your heart's structure and function.

Coronary Angiogram: This test uses dye and X-rays to check for blockages in the heart's arteries.

## **Treatment**

Common Medications include:

ACE Inhibitors: Help relax blood vessels and reduce the workload on the heart.

Beta Blockers: Slow the heart rate and lower blood pressure.

Diuretics: Help reduce fluid buildup in the body.

Lifestyle Changes: These include eating a heart-healthy diet, exercising regularly, quitting smoking, and limiting alcohol intake.

Medical Devices and Surgery:

Implantable Devices: Such as pacemakers or defibrillators to help control heart rhythms.

Surgery: Procedures like coronary artery bypass grafting (CABG) or heart valve repair/replacement.

Heart Transplant: In severe cases, a heart transplant may be necessary.

Managing heart failure often involves a combination of these treatments, tailored to your specific condition and needs. Regular follow-ups with your healthcare provider are crucial to monitor your progress and adjust your treatment plan as needed.

## **Support Groups**

Support groups can be incredibly helpful for people with heart failure, providing a space to share experiences, learn from others, and gain emotional support. Here are a couple of options:

**Heart Failure Matters** (<https://www.heartfailurematters.org/>): This website offers support groups where people with heart failure can share their experiences and learn about managing their condition. They also provide educational sessions on topics like diet and exercise.

**Mended Hearts** (<https://mendedhearts.org/>): This organization has chapters and support groups across the United States. They offer in-person, online, and hybrid meetings where patients and families can share their experiences and ask questions. You can find a chapter near you by entering your zip code on their website.

For additional information, check out:

[Heart failure: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000158.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000158.htm); [How Can I Live with Heart Failure? https://www.heart.org/-/media/files/health-topics/answers-by-heart/how-can-i-live-with-heart-failure.pdf](https://www.heart.org/-/media/files/health-topics/answers-by-heart/how-can-i-live-with-heart-failure.pdf)