



QUESTIONS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ANSWERS

What is Heart Failure?

Heart failure means that the heart is not working as well as it should. The heart is like a pump that sends blood to all parts of the body. An important job of the heart is to send blood to the kidneys. The kidneys remove excess water and salt from the blood. This fluid leaves the body when you pass water (urinate). When the heart cannot pump well, the fluid backs up into the body. The feet and ankles swell. The fluid can also back up into the lungs, making it difficult to breathe. This swelling is called **edema**.

What are the causes of heart failure?

Damage to the heart can be caused by:

- Heart defects at birth
- Blocked or narrow blood vessels
- Alcohol and/or drug abuse
- Infection to the heart or heart valves
- Rheumatic fever
- Diabetes
- A heart beat that is not regular
- Lung disease
- Past heart attack
- High blood pressure

What are the signs of heart failure?

Call your doctor right away if you have any of these signs:

- Short of breath while active or at rest
- Short of breath when lying down
- Always feeling tired

- Feeling weak
- Swollen ankles, feet or legs
- Sudden gain of three to five pounds over one to two days when eating normally
- Bloating
- Need to pass water (urinate) more often
- Confusion
- A heart beat that is too fast or not regular

What tests are used to detect heart failure?

Your doctor can do some tests in the office. These include taking your blood pressure and pulse, and checking your breathing. You may also need blood tests and a chest X-ray. There are a number of other tests you may need. These include:

- **Echocardiogram** – a test used to see how well your heart is pumping blood.
 - First, the doctor rubs a gel on your chest.
 - Then, the doctor presses a small device that is like a microphone on your chest.
 - The microphone picks up sound waves from your heart.
 - A computer turns the sound waves into a moving picture of your heart.
- **EKG (electrocardiogram)** – a test that records electrical activity in the heart.
 - During this test, the doctor places metal disks on your arms, legs and chest. The disks are hooked up by wires to a machine.
 - This machine reads your heart activity and traces it on a paper as wavy lines.
 - Your doctor reads these lines to learn the condition of your heart.
- **MUGA scan** – a test that shows how much blood the heart pumps with each beat.
 - During this test, dye is injected into your veins. This dye makes the blood flow easier to see.
 - Patches are attached to your chest. These patches are hooked up to a screen by wires.
 - A special camera will make several passes over your body.
 - A movie of your blood flow will appear on the screen.

- **Holter monitor** – a test that acts like a tape recorder and checks for irregular heart beats.
 - In this test, small disks are attached to your chest.
 - The disks are attached by wires to a small recorder, called a Holter Monitor.
 - You wear this monitor on a belt or shoulder strap.
 - After 24 hours, you return the monitor to the doctor’s office.
 - Your doctor reads the recording to find out the condition of your heart.

- **Stress test** – a test that shows how your heart reacts to exercise.
 - This test looks at your heart while you are active.
 - You will walk on an exercise machine called a treadmill, or pedal on a stationery bike.
 - You will have patches attached to your chest, shoulders and hips.
 - These patches are hooked up to a machine by wires.
 - This machine shows a picture on a screen of how well your heart is working.
 - It will also make a paper record for your doctor to read.

- **Cardiac Catheterization** – a test that shows how well the heart moves blood through the body.
 - During this test, the doctor makes a small cut in your arm or groin.
 - The doctor then passes a narrow tube, called a catheter, through the cut into the large blood vessels (arteries) to the heart.
 - Next, the doctor puts dye in the catheter. The dye makes it easier to see the heart on an X-ray screen.
 - The doctor then moves the catheter to the heart’s main pumping area to see how well it is working.
 - Most people who have a cardiac catheterization go home within six to eight hours.

Talk to your doctor about which test you need to have.

What treatments exist for heart failure?

There are several things you can do to help your heart pump better. These include medicine, healthy eating, checking your weight, fluid intake and exercise.

Medicines

The doctor will give you medicines that will:

- Make your heart beat stronger
- Help remove excess fluid from your body

Some of these medicines may cause side effects, such as:

- Coughing
- Feeling dizzy
- Slow heart beat
- Low blood pressure
- Blurred vision
- Not wanting to eat

Tell your doctor right away if you have any of these side effects.

Tips for managing your medicine

- Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you do not understand what you are taking.
- Check the label on the bottle. Make sure it is the correct medicine.
- Let your doctor know if you are taking any **over-the-counter** medicines. These are medicines you can buy off the shelf. You do not need a prescription from your doctor to buy them. These over-the-counter medicines may react with your heart medicines. **Do not take:**
 - Advil
 - Midol
 - Aleve
 - Motrin
 - Naprosyn
- There are other medicines you might take on a doctor's order (prescription). Be sure to tell your heart doctor if you take any of these because they may cause fluid build-up and kidney problems:
 - Naprosyn (Naproxyn)
 - Celebrex (Celecoxib)
 - Feldene (Piroxicam)
- Carry a list of all your medicines in your wallet. This will help your doctors and nurses to take better care of you in an emergency.
- Keep a list each day of the medicines you are taking, how much medicine you are taking and when you take your medicine.

- If you miss a dose of your heart medicine, **do not double the next dose.** Check with your doctor about how much medicine to take.
- If you are taking water pills (diuretics) to get rid of excess water, you may lose too much potassium. Potassium helps to keep the heart beat regular. Your doctor may give you a prescription for potassium. You can also eat foods that have potassium, including:
 - Bananas
 - Potatoes
 - Spinach
 - Broccoli
 - Winter squash, such as acorn squash or butternut squash
 - Dried apricots and raisins
 - Dry beans and lentils
 - Cantaloupe
 - Prunes
 - Peas
 - Low-fat or non-fat milk or yogurt
 - Orange Juice
 - Tomatoes

Tips for Saving Money

- Your doctor may prescribe generic medicines instead of brand name medicines. Generics contain the same things as brand name medicines and are just as effective.
- Check with your insurance company. Some medicines may not be covered. If you need help paying bills or buying medicines, ask your social worker or case worker to assist you with this.
- Ask your social worker how to get mail order medicines. The prices may be lower.

Healthy Eating

It is important to stay away from salt (also called sodium). Read the labels on packages or cans of food. Foods that are 140 mg per serving or less are low-sodium. Do not eat more than 600 mg of sodium at one meal.

- Do not take in more than 2,000 mg of salt in a 24-hour period.
- Take the salt shaker off of the table. Talk to a dietitian about other ways to flavor food, including using herbs and spices.
- Eat fresh or frozen vegetables. Canned vegetables and soups contain high amounts of salt.

- Eat fresh meats. Meats that are pickled, smoked or cured are high in salt. These include hot dogs, lunch meats, bacon and ham.
- Many fast food restaurants have food that is high in salt. These include:
 - French fries
 - Sauces on hamburgers
 - Gravy
 - Salad dressings
 - Soy sauce
 - Ketchup
- Stay away from salty snacks, such as salted crackers, chips and pretzels.
- **If you currently smoke, quit.** Smoking narrows the blood vessels and makes the heart work harder. Smoking causes lung disease and cancer. Smoking makes it difficult to breathe. Ask your doctor or nurse about ways to quit smoking.
- Do not drink alcohol. It can have the following negative effects:
 - Slow your heart rate
 - Make your heart failure worse
 - React with your heart medicines
- Limit your intake of caffeine. Caffeine can cause an unsteady heart beat and make you feel nervous. Caffeine is in:
 - Coffee
 - Tea
 - Soda pop
- Eat foods low in fat. Eating foods high in fat can lead to other heart problems.
- Ask your doctor if you can eat grapefruits or grapefruit juice. Grapefruit reacts with many heart medicines.

Weigh yourself daily

The best way to know if you are holding in water is to weigh yourself at the same time every day.

Use the chart below to keep track of your weight. A sudden weight gain may indicate that your heart cannot pump enough blood to the kidneys. A back-up of fluid may be starting.

Call your doctor if you gain two or more pounds in one to two days when you are eating normally.

Doctor's

Name: _____ Phone: _____

MONTH: _____

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week of:							
Weight:							
Week of:							
Weight:							
Week of:							
Weight:							
Week of:							
Weight:							
MONTH:							
Week of:							
Weight:							
Week of:							
Weight:							
Week of:							
Weight:							
Week of:							
Weight:							

Write down your weight every day. You can make copies of this to use, or you can buy a calendar and use it to write your weight down.

Keep track of your fluid intake

Your doctor may tell you to limit your fluids. With heart failure, fluids do not move through the body easily. Talk to your doctor about how much fluid is right for you.

A typical fluid restriction	cups per day (ounces/day)
1200 ml	5 cups (40 oz)
1500 ml	6 cups (48 oz)
1800 ml	7 cups (56 oz)
2000 ml	8 cups (64 oz)

All liquids counted as fluids include:

- Water
- Milk
- Coffee and tea
- Juice
- Soda pop
- Alcohol
- Soup
- All other beverages, such as fruit punch, Kool-Aid, lemonade, etc.
- Jello
- Pudding
- Yogurt
- Ice cream and sherbet
- Popsicles

Key measurements to remember:

- 1 cup = 8 oz.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup = 4 oz.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ popsicle = 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.

Tips to help you keep track of your fluid intake if you are instructed to restrict/limit your fluids:

- Use a measuring cup.
- Keep a daily diary or tally of the fluids you drink in a small notebook or on a sheet of paper.
- Drink only when you are thirsty. Do not drink out of habit or to be social.
- Freeze fruit like grapes or berries, and eat them in place of fluids between meals.

- Use hard candy to keep your mouth moist.
- Do not eat salty foods since they increase thirst.

What exercises should I do?

Check with your doctor to see what exercises you can and cannot do. Make sure your exercise includes a warm-up and cool-down. Stay indoors when the weather is very hot, very cold or humid.

How can I prevent attacks of heart failure?

- Keep your doctor appointments.
- Weigh yourself every day. If you do not have a scale, ask your social worker how to get one.
- Take your medicines exactly as your doctor tells you to take them.
- Monitor your salt intake.
- Monitor your fluid intake.
- Raise your legs on a stool when you are sitting.
- Ask your doctor about wearing special stockings to keep swelling down.
- Take regular walks. Talk to your doctor about how much you can walk.
- Wash your hands often.
- Stay away from people who have colds.
- Get plenty of rest and take naps.
- Learn to relax. Try listening to music or learning how to meditate.
- Talk with your doctor about sexual concerns.

For more information, please contact the following:

The Cardiac Rehab Center
St. Vincent Charity Hospital
2351 E. 22nd Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44115
216.363.2693

The American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org
1.800.242.8721

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute Information Center
www.nhlbi.nih.gov
1.301.592.9573

How can I find a Doctor?

St. Vincent Charity Hospital has doctors who have special training in the treatment of heart problems. To contact one of our doctors, please call:

Physician Referral Line at 1.800.223.8662

Visit our website at www.stvincentcharity.com.

St. Vincent Charity Hospital

2351 East 22nd Street

Cleveland, Ohio 44115

216.861.6200

TTY: Ohio Relay 1.800.750.0750

HealthCare Center at Saint Luke's Pointe

11201 Shaker Boulevard

Cleveland, Ohio 44104

216.721.6900

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**ST. VINCENT CHARITY
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