

Emergency Department – St. Paul’s Hospital

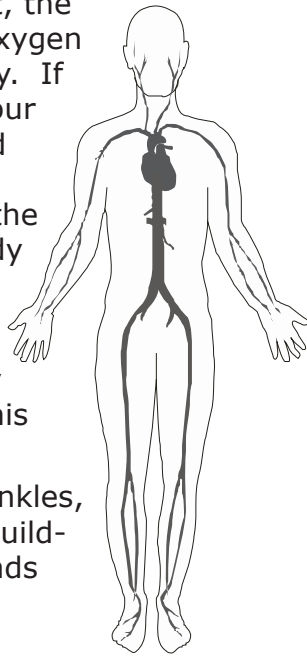
Heart Failure Going Home

What is Heart Failure?

In a normal healthy heart, the heart pumps blood and oxygen to every part of your body. If you have heart failure, your heart muscle is weakened and does not pump well. Your heart cannot pump the amount of blood your body needs.

When your heart does not pump well, your body holds on to extra fluid. This can result in:

- Swelling in the feet, ankles, legs, or stomach. This build-up is called edema (sounds like *ah-dee-ma*).
- Fluid build-up in your lungs. This is called congestion (sounds like *kun-jest-shun*).



Some people worry that ‘failure’ means the heart has stopped beating. This is not true. Your heart keeps working, but it can’t pump hard enough to get the blood and oxygen needed to all parts of your body.

Some causes of heart failure:

- High blood pressure.
- Damage to your heart muscle such as from a heart attack.
- Heart valve problems.
- Disease of the heart.
- Infection of the heart muscle or heart valves.

What to watch for

Watch for these signs of heart failure. You may notice some or all of these.

- You feel more tired. You don’t have energy to do daily activities.
- You feel short of breath when you do activities.
- You have swelling in your hands, feet, ankles, and lower legs.
- You put on weight quickly, sometimes in one day.
- You cough when lying down.
- You find it harder to breathe when lying down.
- You wake up at night feeling short of breath.
- You feel your heart beating fast.

How to take care of yourself at home

The most important thing you can do is to follow the instructions the doctor has given you.

Take your medicines as instructed.

Weigh yourself each morning before you eat breakfast. Write down how much you weigh.

Do not drink any more than 6 to 8 cups of fluid in a day.

Keep the total amount of salt you eat in a day to less than 1500mg.

- Check the ‘sodium’ content on nutrition labels.
- Keep track of how much sodium you eat in a day.
- Do not add extra salt to your food.

Try to get a little exercise each day. Take time to rest after exercise and activity. Some people feel lightheaded or dizzy when moving from lying down to sitting up or when moving from sitting to standing up. If you do, take your time, move slowly.

Quit smoking.

Heart Failure - continued

When to get help

Call your doctor or nurse practitioner if any of your signs of heart failure get worse or you have signs that you haven't had before.

Examples of when to call or visit your doctor or nurse practitioner:

- You gain 5 pounds (2.5 kilograms) in a week or 4 pounds (2 kilograms) in two days.
- You feel more short of breath.
- You have increased signs of swelling such as swollen ankles, bloating, or clothing feeling tight.
- It is harder for you to breathe when you are lying down. You find it easier to sleep sitting up in a chair.
- You feel more tired and have no energy to do daily activities.
- Any feelings of being lightheaded or dizzy that are new or worse than usual.

Call 911 if:

- You have difficulty breathing.
- Your shortness of breath does not ease when you sit still.
- You are having chest pain or chest tightness lasting longer than 15 minutes.
- You are having trouble thinking clearly or are feeling confused.
- You have a fast heart beat that does not slow down when you rest.
- You pass out or faint.

Do you have any questions?

It's good to ask:

- Your doctor
- Your nurse practitioner
- Your pharmacist
- HealthLink BC.
Call 8-1-1 (or 7-1-1 for TTY)
or visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca

Your questions:

The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team.