

Heart Failure Basics



Patient Education Series
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Heart is a pump made up of muscles, and it's basic function is to pump blood to rest of the body. Heart Failure is a condition where heart is not able to pump enough blood out to meet body's requirements.

Common causes of heart failure include:

1. Weak heart muscle, typically after a heart attack
2. Abnormalities of the heart valves
3. Abnormal heart rhythm
4. Excessive alcohol intake, uncontrolled blood pressure or diabetes
5. Few others uncommon causes

Issues related to heart failure:

- + If body organs don't get enough blood, they don't work properly.
- + If blood is not pumped out of the heart efficiently, it leads to back pressure changes into the lungs.

Common symptoms of heart failure:

1. Breathing difficulty, particularly on exertion or lying down
2. Leg swelling, with or without abdominal bloating
3. Getting tired easily
4. Rapid weight gain
5. Decreased urine production

Treatment of heart failure:

- Water-pill (diuretic) to get rid of excess water.
- Medications to improve blood flow dynamics of the heart. These are a combination of BP medications that reduce workload of the heart.
- Fix the cause which is leading to HF:
 - Coronary blockages: Angioplasty (stent) or Bypass surgery
 - Heart valve malfunction: Valve replacement (surgery or TAVR)
 - Manage high blood pressure and uncontrolled blood sugar
 - Rhythm disorders: Medicines, ablation, or pacemaker implantation
- Extremely weak heart: Advanced pacemakers, or heart transplant

Self-management tips for heart failure:

- Limit salt intake.
 - Cook food with low salt, or cook without any salt and add a pinch of salt each to a cup of curry/vegetables.
 - Avoid salty food items like chips, papad, pickle etc.
 - For the purpose of heart health, all salt types are the same.
 - Ready-to-eat food, restaurant food typically have much higher salt content. Unless a low-salt version is available, home cooked food should be preferred.
- Limit fluid intake.
 - Any food item that flows should be restricted.
 - Trust your thirst. Drink minimum amount that quenches your thirst.
- Daily walking, exercise, yoga (or equivalent) for 30 minutes minimum.
 - Resistance band exercises may help maintaining muscle strength.
 - Don't over-exert. When your body tells you to stop, stop.
- Stress management: meditation, recreational activities etc.
 - Gardening, photography, nature walk, spend time with friends
- If you are overweight, aim to reduce it (~0.5 kg per month is fine).
- Check blood pressure, pulse rate, and body-weight at home.
 - Maintain a logbook with date and time.
 - Inform your doctor if your BP/pulse is too high or too low.
 - Inform your doctor if you gain weight for 3 consecutive days.
- Take medications regularly, as advised.
 - Heart failure medicines can typically be taken before or after food.
 - Avoid taking diuretics at night or when you are going out.
- Quit drinking alcohol. It has a damaging effect to the heart.
- Pain-killers like Ibuprofen, Diclofenac, Naproxen etc. can lead to heart decompensation and should be avoided.
- Patients with heart failure should get vaccinated for SARS-COVID-2, Influenza and Pneumococcal diseases.

Things to know:

- ✓ Medication doses need constant adjustment. It's a good idea to check with your cardiologist every 3 to 6 months to see if any medicine needs a revision. Bring your logbook (BP, pulse rate, and weight) as it helps a cardiologist optimize heart failure medicines more effectively.
- ✓ Patients may occasionally get into 'decompensated' heart failure characterized by worsening breathing, leg swelling, difficulty sleeping etc. Such patients often require hospital stay to get their heart back to 'compensated' state.
- ✓ Heart failure is a lifelong disease. Once it's there, it can only be controlled, not cured.
- ✓ Heart failure patients should check with their doctor before flying or going to a hill-station.

Notes:



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