

Living with Heart Failure

Heart failure is a condition where your heart is not able to pump the blood the way it should. It doesn't mean that your heart has stopped or is about to stop working. It develops over time as the pumping action of the heart grows weaker. It can affect the left side, the right side or both sides of the heart.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE HEART FAILURE?

A diagnosis is usually made when symptoms appear. Your doctor will make the diagnosis after doing a thorough medical history, physical exam and several tests. A test, such as an echocardiogram, will tell your doctor your ejection fraction, which indicates how well your heart is pumping.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM TOLD I HAVE HEART FAILURE?

- Monitor how much fluid you take in every day.
- Eat less salt or sodium, because salt causes you to retain water, increases swelling in your legs, and makes it more difficult for your heart to pump.
- Weigh yourself every day and let your doctor know right away if you gain 2 pounds in one day or 3–5 pounds in one week. This could mean that you have extra fluid building up in your body.
- Check with your doctor about participating in an exercise program. Exercise helps to strengthen your muscles and cardiovascular system, which may reduce the symptoms of heart failure.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Stop smoking.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you use; avoid overuse.
- Keep your blood pressure below 140/90.

WHAT MEDICINES ARE USED TO TREAT HEART FAILURE?

- **ACE Inhibitors**
Lowers blood pressure and reduces the strain on your heart. These medications also may reduce the risk of a future heart attack.
- **Beta Blockers**
Slows your heart rate and lowers your blood pressure to decrease the workload on your heart.
- **Diuretics (water pills)**
Helps reduce fluid build-up in your lungs and swelling in your ankles and feet.
- **Aldosterone Antagonist**
Helps the kidneys to eliminate unneeded water and salt from the body. Improves symptoms and can prevent worsening heart failure.

WILL I ALWAYS HAVE HEART FAILURE?

Heart failure usually cannot be cured. Most likely you will have to take medications for the rest of your life. The symptoms of heart failure may get worse over time, so it is important to:

- Have regular appointments with your doctor.
- Take your medications as directed.
- Call the Independent Health 24-Hour Medical Help Line and ask to speak with a nurse. Independent Health can help develop a plan with your doctor to manage any changes in symptoms you may have.
- Talk to your doctor about the pneumonia vaccine and yearly flu shot.

Independent Health Resources

A HEART FAILURE ACTION PLAN

A plan will help you understand what to do when you feel well, when symptoms are present, when you don't feel well, or when you need to get help immediately.

A nurse can work with you to create an action plan. Our registered nurses are available to educate members about their health condition, and ways to manage their condition. If you would like to know more about managing your heart failure, please call our Customer Service Department using the number on your ID card, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., and ask to speak to a nurse.

VISIT HEALTHWISE ONLINE

Healthwise is an online health management resource that provides you with interactive tools and information on hundreds of health topics, symptoms, prescriptions, drug interactions and more, so you can take charge of your personal health and lifestyle goals. Visit independenthealth.com/healthwise to get started.

NEW YORK STATE SMOKERS' QUITLINE

Independent Health knows that quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health, but we also realize that it is one of the most difficult habits to break. The best place to start is the New York State Smokers' Quitline. The toll-free number is 1-866-697-8487 or 1-866-NYQUITS, or visit the website at nysmokefree.com.

24-HOUR MEDICAL HELP LINE*

If you have a health concern and can't reach your doctor, you can call our Medical Help Line – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The 24-Hour Medical Help Line provides a staff of professional registered nurses who are available to answer your call and respond to your questions based upon symptoms.

Call **1-800-501-3439** at any time.

**Independent Health's 24-Hour Medical Help Line should not be used for diagnosis or as a substitute for a physician.*

