



# Lifestyles for **Heart Failure**

## What causes heart failure?

Heart failure occurs when the heart doesn't pump enough blood to supply oxygen to the lungs, kidneys and other organs. The heart's left side, right side or both sides can be involved in heart failure, but it usually starts on the left side. Left-side heart failure causes fluid build up in the lungs, resulting in shortness of breath and coughing. With right-side heart failure, blood builds up in veins, causing swelling of the feet, legs and abdomen. Heart failure can be a natural consequence of getting older, but there can be other causes of heart failure:

Cause	What happens
<b>Untreated high blood pressure</b>	The heart enlarges and its contractions are weakened.
<b>Diabetes with uncontrolled blood sugar</b>	This can cause coronary heart disease and heart attack.
<b>High cholesterol levels</b>	Fatty deposits build up inside the arteries keeping the blood from flowing through.
<b>Cardiomyopathy</b>	The heart becomes enlarged and stiffened, and works inefficiently. It is caused by alcohol, infection and certain drugs.
<b>Heart valves</b>	They may not open or close correctly and may require surgical repair.
<b>Health problems</b>	Conditions such as lung disease, thyroid or anemia can also cause heart problems.

Sources: *National Institutes of Health Health A to Z*

## Live stronger with early diagnoses and treatment

The earlier heart failure is diagnosed and treatment begins, the better your chances for an improved quality of life down the road. The damage from heart failure cannot be reversed, but you can prevent further damage by making some lifestyle changes.

### Keep your blood pressure under control.

High blood pressure makes the heart work harder.

**Monitor your cholesterol.** Follow a low saturated fat diet to reduce cholesterol levels and prevent plaque buildup in the arteries. Eat baked or broiled fish, such as tuna or salmon, that is rich in heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

**Stop smoking and stay away from secondhand smoke.** Call BCN's Quit the Nic program for help at 800-811-1764 from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday (TTY users should call 800-240-3050).

**Avoid alcohol use.** Drinking alcohol may damage the liver, which is already stressed by heart failure.

**Watch fluid intake.** Keep a diary of your daily weight and call your doctor if there is a weight gain of three or more pounds in a day, or five or more pounds in a week. Drinking too much fluid can worsen heart failure. Discuss with your doctor how much fluid you should have each day and then stay within these limits.

**Aim for a healthier weight.** Being overweight places a great deal of stress on the heart, especially on an already weakened heart.

**Limit sodium.** Too much salt causes fluid retention and makes the heart work harder. Dietary sodium is usually restricted to 2000 mg or less per day. This includes the sodium that is already in the foods you eat. So check the label and don't add salt when you prepare meals.

**See your doctor.** Get treatment for heart arrhythmias or a thyroid disorder.

**Stay active.** Try walking or riding a stationary bike. Start slowly, increasing the length or intensity of your activity if you feel up to it. Stop exercising if you have shortness of breath, dizziness, chest pain, nausea or a cold sweat. Check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.

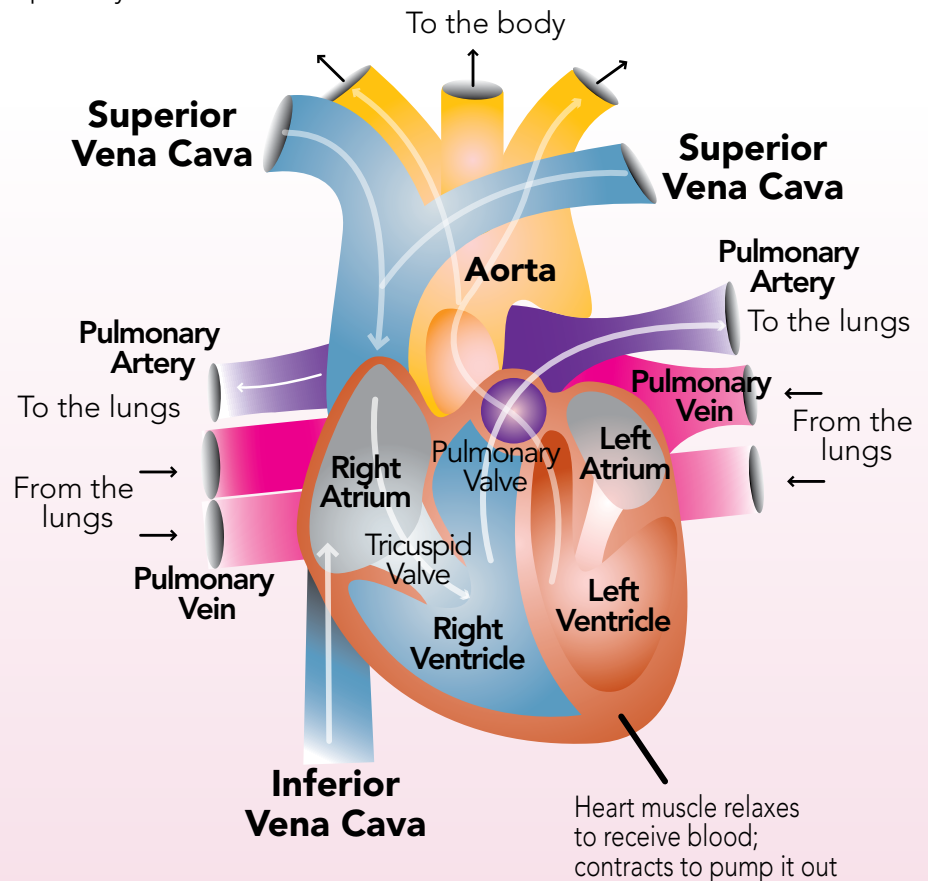
**Decrease stress.** Stress can make your heart pump faster. Try deep breathing and relaxation exercises. Get enough sleep at night.

Sources: *National Institutes of Health Health A to Z*

## Monitoring your ejection fraction

You may hear the term "ejection fraction" used by your doctor. The ejection fraction is a good baseline test for monitoring the heart's function over time. Some blood always remains in the heart chambers after each heartbeat. A healthy heart has an ejection fraction between 50 percent and 75 percent. This means that 50 percent to 75 percent of blood filling the heart's left ventricle gets pumped out with each beat. The ejection fraction can decrease if heart muscle has been damaged from a heart attack, valve problems or cardiomyopathy.

Sources: *National Institutes of Health Health A to Z*



## Know your meds

Medications are an important part of treatment for heart failure. Most people need several to keep their heart pumping well. Take your medication as directed by your physician. Do not adjust the dose or stop taking your meds without discussing it first with your doctor. Bring a list of your medications and any over-the-counter products you are taking to your doctor visits for review. Some medications may have side effects. If you notice any nausea, dry cough, dizziness, muscle cramps or heart rhythm problems, report this to your doctor.

Some medications prescribed for heart failure are:

**Angiotensin converting enzyme, or ACE, inhibitors** – These medications open up blood vessels and decrease the workload of the heart.

**Diuretics** – They help reduce the amount of fluid in the body, making it easier for the heart to pump blood. Because diuretics make the body lose potassium, blood needs to be checked regularly to make sure the potassium level is normal.

**Digitalis®** – The force of the heart's contractions increase with this drug, improving circulation and preventing heart rhythm disturbances. When the heart pumps better, more oxygen-rich blood is distributed throughout the body and breathing improves.

**Angiotensin receptor blockers, or ARBs** – Like ACE inhibitors, ARBs reduce the workload of the heart (in fact, this class of drug is recommended for those who cannot tolerate ACE inhibitors). These medications reduce stress on the heart muscle and may help patients with diabetes and heart disease. This medication also protects kidneys from diabetes-related complications.

**Beta-blockers** – The heart rate and heart's output of blood decreases when a person takes beta-blockers. As a result of the heart's slowing contraction rate and reduced pumping action, the heart's workload is lessened and symptoms improve.

Sources: *National Institutes of Health Health A to Z*

## You can lighten your heart's workload

- Lose weight if needed.
- Avoid temperature extremes. The body works harder to keep your temperature normal when you're too hot or too cold.
- If you're out in very cold weather, cover your mouth with a scarf.
- Limit caffeine to one or two cups per day.
- Stop drinking alcohol. It weakens the heart.
- Avoid pushing or pulling heavy objects and lifting anything heavier than 10 pounds.
- Take frequent rest periods during the day. If possible, elevate your legs while resting.
- Eat small portions of food throughout the day since digesting large meals require a lot of energy.
- Wear loose clothing with front openings, zippers, or Velcro® to make dressing easier and more comfortable.
- Use support stockings to prevent swelling in the ankles and legs during the day.

Sources: *National Institutes of Health Health A to Z*

## Take control with an advance directive

Planning for the future should include making an advance care plan. An advance directive is a written statement of your health care wishes in case you aren't able to make your own care decisions. It lets you decide, in advance, the medical treatments you want and authorizes someone you know and trust to make decisions for you when you can't. Talk to your doctor about your health and potential future health needs. You may want to discuss your wishes with family and friends. The person you select as your advocate will work with your doctors in the event that you are ill and can't communicate your decisions yourself.

Two types of advance directives are:

- *Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care* form (used in Michigan)
- Living will (not authorized by Michigan law)

Advance directive forms are available online at **MiBCN.com/medicare** or by calling the Customer Service number on the back of your ID card.

Sources: **MiBCN.com** and **MiBCN.com/medicare**



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*If you have any questions about this program, if you feel you have received this information in error or if you would prefer not to receive more information, call the Disease Management department. Please call to inquire about our resources for members with special needs.*

## Disease Management programs

**800-392-4247**  
**800-257-9980 (TTY)**  
8:30 a.m. to 5 pm. Monday through Friday

## Customer Service

Call the number on the back of your ID card