

# Common Tests for Heart Failure

If your healthcare provider suspects that you have heart failure they will recommend some common tests to properly diagnose it.

And if you have already been diagnosed with heart failure you may continue to have these tests regularly to monitor your heart and make decisions about your treatment.

Your healthcare team may give you blood tests regularly to check your kidney function, blood count, and sodium and potassium levels. These tests can help identify if you have heart failure and how advanced it is.

*“Routine lab work is often helpful to check kidney function, glucose, rule-out diabetes, anemia, some of those types of things.”*

Your healthcare provider may also recommend a chest X-ray. The X-ray can help to show enlargement of the heart and possible fluid in the lungs. These are both symptoms of heart failure.

They may also recommend that you have an electrocardiogram, commonly known as an ECG.

An ECG can help identify damage to the heart muscle caused by a previous heart attack. It can also detect abnormal heart rhythms that may be dangerous.

Some ECG tests might be done to see if your heart is getting enough oxygen during activity. This is called an exercise stress test.

Another common test you will have is called an Echocardiogram.

This test uses ultrasound waves that shows a picture of the heart at work. It allows your healthcare provider to see the percentage of blood pumped from the heart with every heartbeat.

*“A second tier of testing generally would involve an echocardiogram or ultrasound of the heart in which tells us something about the heart function. Does it pump normally, does it relax normally, are the valves opening appropriately. Are there narrowing of the valves or leaking of the valves.”*

This measurement is called Ejection Fraction. In certain types of heart failure, it is used to monitor treatment.

Your doctor may also recommend other tests, such as magnetic resonance imaging or a type of nuclear testing called ventriculography. These tests are also designed to give your healthcare provider a clear view of how the heart is working.

Finally, you may be asked to have a cardiac catheterization. In this test, a very thin tube called a catheter is inserted through an artery in the groin and guided toward the heart.

Once there, a special fluid is injected into the heart that shows up on an X-ray. This gives your healthcare provider an even clearer picture of your heart.

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Cardiac catheterization is usually done in a specially equipped facility called a cardiac catheterization lab. It requires minor incisions, local anesthetic and light sedation.

All of these common tests can help diagnose and monitor heart failure. Your healthcare team can then use the results of these tests to create a heart failure treatment plan just for you. Your treatment plan will likely include lifestyle changes and medications that are designed to support your heart and reduce symptoms.

You are a vital part of your treatment plan. If you notice any changes in your symptoms or start feeling worse, alert your healthcare team right away so they can consider making changes to your plan.

If you have any questions about the tests your healthcare provider recommends, be sure to ask.

Having your heart failure monitored on a routine basis can help keep your treatment plan on the right track in order to reduce your symptoms and help you feel better.