

What Your Heart Failure Diagnosis Means

Hearing the words “You have heart failure” can be scary. It’s only natural to wonder what that means and how your life will change.

It can help to understand what heart failure is, and how you can work with your healthcare team to help treat it.

Heart failure is a chronic condition, meaning that it doesn't go away. Your heart failure treatment plan will include things you will be doing for the rest of your life, although your treatment may change over time.

“Heart failure is a condition where the heart itself doesn't fill or doesn't pump properly.”

The heart doesn't get enough oxygen-rich blood to your organs and tissues.

The heart muscle is weakened and may become enlarged and flabby or stiff.

It can be caused by several conditions, including other types of heart disease, smoking, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

People with heart failure may have few or even no symptoms early on.

As time passes, symptoms can include feeling tired or short of breath, swelling, coughing or wheezing, a fast heartbeat, and confusion.

After a diagnosis, your doctor and medical team will create a treatment plan. The goal of treatment is to reduce symptoms and slow the progression of the heart failure, so you can continue to enjoy day-to-day activities as much as possible.

Treatments for heart failure include medications to support your heart and reduce symptoms and making lifestyle changes like reducing sodium intake, quitting smoking and staying active.

Depending on how advanced your heart failure is, treatments may also include using implanted devices like pacemakers and defibrillators that help your heart function. Heart transplants are sometimes needed for the most severe cases.

You can help by being actively involved in your treatment. This means taking all medications as prescribed, making the recommended changes in your lifestyle, and keeping all of your medical appointments.

It can also be very helpful to build your support network. Whether your support network is your family and friends, a religious group, or through an organization like the American Heart Association, it can be very comforting to talk with people who can understand and help you follow your treatment plan.

Although heart failure is a serious, chronic condition, your healthcare team will help you live as full and active a life as possible after your diagnosis.