

# Understanding Ejection Fraction

During treatment for heart failure, you will hear the words ejection fraction, also called EF.

What does this mean, and how do healthcare providers use the ejection fraction to help treat your heart failure?

Let's look at the heart.

The heart is a muscular organ that pumps blood throughout your body.

The heart has four chambers. They are divided into upper and lower chambers. The upper chambers are called the atria. The lower chambers are called the ventricles.

The ventricles are the heart's main pumping chambers. They have strong muscular walls that squeeze with each beat of the heart, sending blood throughout the body.

During a normal heartbeat, not all of the blood is pumped from the ventricles.

*"Ejection fraction is simply a percentage of blood that the heart, more specifically the left ventricle, pumps out on any given beat. Ejection fraction should be 55 percent or above."*

A normal ejection fraction is between 50 and 70 percent. This means that at least 50 percent of the blood in the ventricle is pumped out during each heartbeat.

For many people with heart failure, the weakened heart muscle can't pump enough blood. This type of heart failure has a low EF, sometimes called heart failure with reduced ejection fraction, abbreviated HFrEF.

For others, heart failure occurs when the heart is unable to relax and fill with blood. This type of heart failure has a normal EF, sometimes called heart failure with preserved ejection fraction, abbreviated HFpEF.

Measuring the ejection fraction is a common way to diagnose heart failure. Your EF will be checked routinely to check for any change in your heart function.

The most common test used to measure ejection fraction is an echocardiogram. This type of test uses ultrasound waves to create a picture of the heart as it beats.

The test is non-invasive and painless.

Ejection fraction is an important tool used to help create your heart failure treatment plan. If you have a low ejection fraction, the goal is to increase it as much as possible.

If your EF is normal, it will still be important to follow your treatment plan to keep your heart failure under control.

*"Ejection fractions that are less than 35 percent-- we know those patients are at risk of sudden cardiac death and dying at a younger age, and for those patients oftentimes if they don't improve after a reasonable amount of time on medications then sometimes implantable defibrillators or ICDs are recommended for those patients."*

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You can help protect your ejection fraction by sticking with your treatment plan. This means following sodium and fluid guidelines, taking medication when prescribed, keeping all your appointments, and getting the right amount of activity for you.

Although you won't be able to feel it if your ejection fraction changes, if you experience any sudden changes in your symptoms, you should contact your healthcare team right away.

*"When I was diagnosed with heart failure, my ejection fraction was around 15 percent. But now from the medication, through exercise, just watching what I eat, reading labels, now my ejection fraction is up around 45 percent. So that's-- hey, that's something to be glad about!"*