

Treating Heart Failure: Medications, Devices, and Surgery

The goal of heart failure treatment is simple: to protect as much of the heart's function as possible.

While there are many things you can do to help your treatment, your healthcare provider may recommend several different types of treatments.

Heart failure is a chronic condition that often gets worse with time. This can mean you have more symptoms and that your heart is not working as well.

The choice of treatment for heart failure depends on how serious the condition is.

The first line of treatment is usually lifestyle changes and taking medications.

You might be prescribed several medications for your heart failure. Each one treats a different symptom or contributing factor. Each medication comes with its own instructions and rules. They can't do their job if you don't take them correctly.

It's important to take your medications exactly as prescribed. Talk to your healthcare provider for tips on taking your medications.

"Taking medications as prescribed is extremely important. Even if you feel great and think you're invincible and don't need medications. It's very important to continue those medicines."

If your heart failure gets worse, your doctor might recommend a device to help your heart.

Pacemakers help your heart keep a steady beat. They are implanted just under your skin and connected to the heart with wires.

Implantable cardioverter defibrillators, or ICDs, are also implanted. This device monitors your heart beat.

If a dangerous heart beat is detected, it sends an electrical shock to the heart to shock it back into a normal rhythm.

This device is often combined with a pacemaker.

"The devices typically used in heart failure-- sometimes patients have slow heart rates, and the cardiac output actually is dependent partly on the heart rate, so sometimes simple pacemakers are recommended for people that have heart failure. Sometimes the electrical system in patients with heart failure is impaired and the ventricles are activated and you get dyssynchrony in the bottom chambers or the right and the left ventricles, and sometimes there are special pacemakers called biventricular pacemakers or cardiac resynchronization therapy devices that help pace both of those ventricles in sync. And finally there are implantable defibrillators or devices that are capable of shocking the heart out of irregular heart rhythms that could potentially be fatal otherwise."

If your heart failure continues to get worse, your doctor might recommend a special type of pump called a left ventricular assist device, sometimes referred to as an LVAD.

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This device attaches to the heart and helps it pump blood. The pump is implanted in your body. It is attached to an external power source that is worn on the body.

“First thing that was put in me was a pacemaker defibrillator. The second device was an LVAD, which is called the left ventricle saving device, and what that does is it keeps your heart pumping, okay, and it’s a bridge to transplant.”

In very severe cases, your doctor might recommend a heart transplant.

This is major surgery that requires a donor heart. During a heart transplant, a diseased heart is replaced with a healthy donor heart.

Your heart failure treatment plan is designed to support your heart as much as possible and reduce your symptoms.

Your plan can change as your heart failure changes.

Make sure to take your medications as directed.

Keep all of your appointments and learn about the different treatment options.

When you know how heart failure is treated, it will help you work together with your healthcare provider to make the best decisions for you.