

Common Tests for Diagnosing and Monitoring Heart Failure

There are many tests that healthcare providers recommend to diagnose and monitor patients with heart failure. Here are some of the commonly used tests that may be included in your heart failure plan.

Blood tests may be done regularly to check your kidney and liver function, blood count, sodium and potassium levels, and other signals of heart failure.

This information can tell you if you have heart failure, and how advanced it is.

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

Chest x-rays can help to show enlargement of the heart and any possible fluid in the lungs. Both are signs of heart failure.

An electrocardiogram, or 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.

An ECG can also check to see if your heart is receiving enough blood supply during activity. This takes place during 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 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 there leaking of the valves.”

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

An MRI, or magnetic resonance imaging, may also be recommended.

After the recommended tests are done, your health care team can use the results to create a heart failure treatment plan that works best for you. This will most likely include lifestyle changes and medications that are designed to support your heart and reduce symptoms.

You are the most important part of managing your health. Your healthcare team will not be as helpful if you don't let them know that there are problems.

If you notice any changes in your symptoms, or you start to feel worse, alert your healthcare team right away so they can consider making changes to your treatment plan. If you have any questions about the tests, the plan, or your health, be sure to ask.

Having your heart failure monitored on a routine basis can help keep your heart health on the right track.