

Heart Failure: What Is It?

Your heart is a muscle that pumps blood throughout your body by relaxing and filling the chambers of the heart with blood.

Then it contracts to send the oxygen and nutrient-filled blood around your body.

When your heart muscle doesn't pump as much blood as you need, it's called heart failure.

It's important to understand that heart failure doesn't mean that your heart has stopped.

Your heart is just not pumping as well as it should.

There are two main types of heart failure.

One is heart failure with preserved ejection fraction.

It's sometimes called diastolic heart failure.

You may hear your doctor use those words, so here's what they mean.

With diastolic heart failure, the heart's left muscle may be stiff and thickened.

The heart has a hard time relaxing and filling with blood, so less blood is pumped out to the body.

And the second type is heart failure with reduced ejection fraction.

And that's sometimes called systolic heart failure.

With systolic heart failure, the heart's left ventricle may be enlarged so the heart has a hard time pumping.

And that means less blood is pumped out to the body.

This is a lot, so here it is again.

With diastolic heart failure, your heart muscle is having a problem relaxing and filling with blood.

And with systolic heart failure, the heart muscle is having a problem contracting and pumping out blood.

Your doctor will talk to you about the type of heart failure you may have.

But no matter what kind you have, finding out that you have heart failure can be stressful.

But knowing more about what it is, what to expect, and how to care for yourself can help.

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Early on, your symptoms may not bother you.

But as heart failure gets worse, you may start to feel weak, lightheaded, and very tired.

And you may be short of breath and have swelling in your body.

Unfortunately, heart failure is a lifelong disease.

And it tends to get worse over time.

But there is hope.

Treatment can slow the disease, help you feel better, and help keep you out of the hospital.

Treatment may also help you live longer.

So take your medicines as prescribed, have a heart-healthy lifestyle, watch your symptoms, and work closely with your doctor.

These things will give you the best chance to live well with heart failure.

Okay, now, it may be hard to hear this, but now might be a good time to think about the kind of support you want now and at the end of your life.

While you're thinking about these choices, it's important to remember that you are more than your disease.

And there are a lot of ways to care for yourself.

You and your doctor can decide together what treatments will offer more benefits than risks in your plan to care for yourself from now on.

And it's always a good idea to talk to your doctor about advance care planning to decide what kind of care you may want at the end of your life.

It's also important to think about how much you want to let the two words "heart failure" change your identity.

You get to decide just how much those words will affect your outlook and how you live your life.