

# HEART FAILURE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

**Heart failure is a serious and life-changing condition, but there are ways to manage it that will help you feel better, live longer and stay out of hospital.**

## What is heart failure?

Your heart pumps blood around your body. Heart failure occurs when your heart is not pumping as well as it should.

Despite the name, it does not mean that your heart has stopped or failed, it means that your heart is 'failing' to keep up with your body's demands.

There are different types and causes of heart failure. Your health professional can explain more about your condition.

The Heart Foundation's website provides a lot of useful information, at:

[www.heartfoundation.org.au/conditions/heart-failure](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/conditions/heart-failure)

**Take an active role in managing heart failure to help you stay out of hospital and live a better, longer life.**



## What does heart failure mean for my daily life?

Heart failure is a long-term (chronic) condition. Often it cannot be cured and needs lifelong management.

If you are like most people with heart failure, you will need to take medicines every day to help your heart pump blood properly. These medicines are usually needed over a long period but the types and doses of medicines you take may change. Medicines for heart failure are often started at a low dose and will then be adjusted by your doctor to suit you. Each medicine works differently and together they can help you feel better, stay out of hospital and live a longer and healthier life.<sup>1</sup>

Heart failure can cause extra fluid to build up in your lungs, ankles, legs and around your middle. If this happens, you may need to take medicines called diuretics (sometimes called water tablets) to help remove the fluid build-up.

Your doctor will also discuss any changes you need to make to your eating, drinking, or exercise habits.

Having a trusted GP is important if you are living with heart failure. If you have not seen your GP since your heart failure was diagnosed, it's a good idea to make an appointment as soon as possible. Ask your GP for a Heart Failure Patient Action Plan (*Heart failure: more than just your heart*) and fill out the plan together.

**IT'S VERY IMPORTANT** to get to know your medicines and have a medicines list with information about all the medicines you are taking. You can print or download one from [www.nps.org.au/medicineslist](http://www.nps.org.au/medicineslist). Keep it in a place that is always accessible to you and anyone who cares for you. Fill it out with your trusted health professional and bring it to your medical appointments.

Some medicines that are available without a prescription are known to make heart failure worse. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist before taking any new medicines.






<sup>1</sup> The National Heart Foundation of Australia. *What is heart failure?* Available from [www.heartfoundation.org.au/conditions/heart-failure](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/conditions/heart-failure) (accessed 31 January 2021).

## 5 questions to ask your health professional

Here are some questions to ask about what heart failure means for you and what you can do to help your condition.

- 1** How do I know if my heart failure is getting worse; what signs and changes do I need to be aware of?
- 2** What are the most important things my family and I can do to help manage my heart failure?
- 3** What kind of physical activity is safe for me and how often should I be moving?
- 4** How might heart failure affect my other health conditions?
- 5** How might my heart failure change over time? What should I expect in the next few weeks, months and years?

**You will need to make changes to your daily life. There are a lot to remember, so note them down below...**

Monitor		Move	Take	Know
 My healthy weight is: _____ kg	 I need to check sodium on food labels and can have up to: _____ mg of sodium per day.	 I can have up to: _____ ml of fluid per day.	 Every day I should aim to: _____ _____ _____	 <input type="checkbox"/> I have an updated medicines list.
				 I need to seek help when... _____ _____ _____

## How do I know if I need help?

Your health professional will tell you what changes to look out for. Call your GP **within 24 hours** if you are feeling worse than usual or experiencing:

- ▶ swelling in your legs or stomach (your shoes, socks or pants are getting tight)
- ▶ loss or gain of 2 kg of weight in the last 2 days
- ▶ a bad cough, especially at night, or a new cough that won't go away
- ▶ trouble breathing
- ▶ trouble lying down (you have to sit up to sleep)
- ▶ feeling dizzy or like you are going to faint
- ▶ a feeling that your heart is racing and won't slow down (heart palpitations).

**CALL 000 AND ASK FOR AN AMBULANCE IF YOU (OR SOMEONE YOU CARE FOR) HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS OF A HEART ATTACK. COMMON SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:**

- ▶ pain, pressure, heaviness or tightness in the chest, arm, back, jaw, neck or shoulder, dizziness, or difficulty breathing.

Go to [www.heartfoundation.org.au/conditions/heart-attack](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/conditions/heart-attack) to find out more about the warning signs of a heart attack.



## Where can I find out more?

- ▶ Talk to the counsellors on the Beyond Blue helpline **1300 22 4636** if you have been feeling down since your heart failure diagnosis.
- ▶ Read more about heart failure on the Heart Foundation's website: [heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au)
- ▶ Ask our health professionals about medicines by calling **1300 MEDICINE 1300 633 424**

nps.org.au

Level 7/418A Elizabeth Street Surry Hills NSW 2010  
 PO Box 1147 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012  
 ☎ 02 8217 8700 📧 02 9211 7578 📧 info@nps.org.au

© 2021 NPS MedicineWise. Published February 2021. ABN 61 082 034 393 Level 7/418A Elizabeth St, Surry Hills NSW 2010. Independent. Not-for-profit. Evidence-based. Developed with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health. The information provided is not medical advice. Do not use it to treat or diagnose your own or another person's medical condition and never ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something herein. Medicines information changes, and may not be accurate when you access it. To the fullest extent permitted by law, NPS MedicineWise disclaims all liability (including without limitation for negligence) for any loss, damage, or injury resulting from reliance on, or use of this information. NPS2353b