

Medications for heart failure:

There are many different types of medication for HF. It is quite common for some people with HF to take five or more medicines for their whole lives. Some HF medicines are given to make you feel better and others are given to prevent future health problems. Your healthcare team will explain your treatment plan. Although most people cope well with HF medicines, some can cause side effects. If you think you may be getting problematic side effects, you should speak to your HF team or GP before stopping any treatments. Sometimes changing the time of day that you take some of your tablets can make a big difference.

New treatments for HF are being developed all the time, which is why it is important to stay in regular contact with your healthcare team. The following section describes some commonly used HF medicines in more detail.

Medications that improve long term health

These types of medicines do not always make people feel better immediately. Even if it takes weeks or months to notice a difference, this doesn't mean the medicine isn't working. Many respected scientific studies have proved the benefits of these different types of medicines in HF patients if they are taken regularly. There are different categories or 'families' of medicines which have very similar benefits. Some medicines are in a family by themselves.

ACE inhibitors – e.g. Ramipril, Lisinopril, Enalapril
One in three people can get a troublesome dry cough with ACE inhibitors. If you think this applies to you, please discuss this with your healthcare team as alternatives can be suggested.

A2-blockers (ARBs) – e.g. Candesartan, Losartan.
Sacubitril/valsartan, also called Entresto - Entresto provides two medications within a single tablet. It is suitable for people with more severe HF and replaces an ACE inhibitor or ARB.

Beta blockers – Bisoprolol, carvedilol, nebivolol
MRAs - spironolactone, eplerenone

SGLT2 inhibitors – dapagliflozin, empagliflozin, canagliflozin
Ivabradine

Digoxin

Medication that can make you feel better

These treatments do not improve long term heart health, but can improve symptoms such as breathlessness, low energy or leg swelling. There may be times where the doses of these drugs need to be increased when you have more symptoms and decreased again when your symptoms improve.

Diuretics – furosemide, bumetanide

These make you pass more urine and help to relieve breathlessness and ankle swelling. In some cases, they may need to be given into the vein (instead of a tablet) and this could require a hospital admission. Although most people cope well with these medicines, some people find that needing to pass urine more often interferes with their lives. It is best to take these treatments in the morning (and sometimes at lunchtime) to avoid needing to go to the toilet frequently during the night.

Having heart failure can be difficult and worrying. But there are lots of things that you and your healthcare team can do to keep you as well as possible, for as long as possible.

Useful website:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/heart-failure/

Use this space to write down useful telephone numbers:

.....
.....
.....

Any questions or comments?

If you have any comments about this leaflet (good or bad), then please contact office@nwhearts.org.

NW Hearts Charity always welcomes feedback about how we are doing and how we might improve. Unfortunately, NW Hearts Charity can't answer questions about your own health situation.

2024/V1

Disclaimer: NW Hearts Charity hopes that anyone reading this information finds it helpful. However, this is general information and does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please speak to your healthcare professional if you have any questions about your health. So far as is permitted by law, NW Hearts Charity does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information published by us.



Patient information leaflet developed by NW Hearts Charity

You can support us with a donation by using this QR code:



Find out More about Us at: <https://www.nwhearts.org>

Reg. Charity no. 1194189



Heart Failure

Patient information leaflet



NW Hearts Charity

Your heart · Your charity

What is heart failure?

Heart failure (HF) means the heart is no longer able to pump blood around the body properly. It usually happens because the heart muscle has become weak or stiff. It is a common problem. In the UK, it affects 1 to 2 adults out of 100.

Does heart failure mean my heart will stop working?

Although HF can be a serious condition, it does not usually mean that your heart is going to stop working. Instead, it means the heart needs support to help it work better. Some people with HF can feel very unwell but others have no or few symptoms. Many people with HF can improve with the right treatment.

What causes heart failure?

HF has many different causes. These include:

- Problems with the heart arteries or a previous heart attack
- High blood pressure
- Heart valve problems
- Heart rhythm problems
- Anaemia
- Thyroid problems
- Prescribed medicines, such as chemotherapy given in the past for cancer treatment

Sometimes the cause of HF is not certain, even after many tests.

What are the symptoms? (The 3 Fs)

The main symptoms of HF are:

- **Fighting for breath:** feeling breathless
- **Fatigue:** feeling tired a lot of the time or finding exercise exhausting
- **Filling with fluid:** swollen ankles, legs or belly associated with weight gain

Other symptoms may include dizziness, a fast heart rate, or a troublesome cough that doesn't go away.

Diagnosing heart failure

Your healthcare team may use a number of different tests to confirm the diagnosis of HF including:

- Blood tests
- ECG or a 24-hour heart rhythm monitor (a recording of the heart's electrical activity)
- Echocardiogram (a scan of the heart's structure and function using ultrasound)
- Cardiac MRI (a scan of the heart's structure and function using magnetic fields and radio waves)
- Heart artery tests, such as a CT scan or a coronary angiogram
- Genetic testing

Different patients will require different tests. Your healthcare team will explain the tests they are arranging for you and what the results mean.

Things you can do to help control heart failure

Medication – taking prescribed medication on a regular basis can make a big difference to HF symptoms and your future health. More detail on this can be found later in this leaflet.

Physical activity – staying active improves how you feel and your general health. Your healthcare team will invite you to attend a cardiac rehabilitation programme at the hospital, which consists of gentle exercise, education and emotional support if you need it. Many people benefit from these programmes, so we recommend that you attend if you can.

Diet – eating a healthy, balanced diet is important to improve symptoms and general health. Aim to reduce the amount of fried foods, processed food and salt in your diet. Think about ways to increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables you eat every day, as these provide helpful vitamins and minerals.

Stop smoking – we know that stopping smoking can be very difficult, but it is one of the most important things you can do to improve your overall health.



You can discuss this with your HF team or your local pharmacy, who can help. The NHS also has specialised 'stop smoking' teams who can prescribe treatments to prevent withdrawal symptoms and help you cut down or quit.

Get vaccinated – if you have HF, you're at greater risk of catching infectious illnesses like flu and Covid, which can also be more serious for you. Vaccinations can prevent these infections and also turn them into milder illnesses if you do catch them. Please think about getting yourself vaccinated.

Healthy weight - having a healthy body weight is important for people with HF. It can improve symptoms and reduce strain on the heart. We know that losing or gaining weight can be challenging and can take time and effort. Your healthcare team can support you with this.

Daily weighing – your healthcare team may advise you to weigh yourself regularly (not everyone needs to do this). If you notice an increase in weight, you should tell your heart failure team or GP as this can be a sign of fluid retention, which may mean your HF needs more medical attention.

Regular reviews and monitoring - you will be offered regular reviews by your HF team or GP. These are to make sure you are on the best treatment and that you feel as well as possible.

Things your healthcare team can do to help

The aims of HF treatments are to:

- Strengthen your heart function
- Slow down or reverse the disease
- Improve your symptoms and quality of life
- Keep you out of hospital
- Lengthen your lifespan

The main treatments

In some cases, your healthcare team may recommend:

- A device implant in your chest (such as a pacemaker-type device)
- Surgery

However, many people with HF are treated only with medication. Medications for HF can improve heart strength, reduce symptoms or improve other health conditions that make HF worse.

Different patients will need different treatments.

