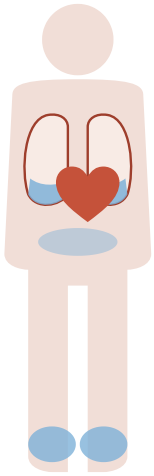
EquaHeart

Heart failure

In heart failure, the heart does not pump or fill with blood as well as it should; it does not mean the heart has stopped. With treatment and daily self-care, many people feel better and live longer.

1 What happens in heart failure



- **A weakened or stiffened heart** pumps less blood with each beat, causing fatigue.
- **Fluid builds up** in the lungs, causing dyspnea (shortness of breath), and in the legs, ankles and abdomen, causing edema (swelling).
- **Ejection fraction (EF)** is the percentage of blood pumped out with each beat. It guides which medications are recommended.

Common causes include previous heart attack, hypertension, valve disease and diabetes.

Common symptoms

Shortness of breath · Fatigue · Swollen feet or ankles · Breathlessness at night · Rapid weight gain

2 Medications

For heart failure with **reduced EF (40% or lower)**, Canadian guidelines recommend four medication classes, usually together:

1. **ARNI, or ACE inhibitor or ARB**
2. **Beta-blocker**
3. **MRA**
4. **SGLT2 inhibitor**

Examples: ARNI, sacubitril/valsartan; MRA, spironolactone; SGLT2 inhibitor, dapagliflozin or empagliflozin.

With **EF above 40%**, SGLT2 inhibitors, MRAs, ARNIs and, for people living with obesity, certain GLP-1 receptor agonists may be recommended. **Diuretics** ("water pills") remove excess fluid.

Doses are increased gradually. Mild fatigue or dizziness at first is common; inform your care team rather than stopping.

3 Daily self-monitoring

Green: stable

- Weight stable
- Breathing as usual
- No new swelling

Continue your usual routine.

Yellow: contact your care team today

- Weight gain of **1 kg (2 lb) or more overnight**, **2 kg (4 lb) or more in 2 days**, or **more than 3 kg (5 lb) in a week**
- Increasing breathlessness, needing more pillows, or new swelling

Red: call 911

- Severe shortness of breath at rest
- Chest pain that does not resolve
- Fainting or new confusion

Weigh yourself each morning after emptying your bladder and before breakfast, and record the result.

4 Self-care

- **Limit sodium (salt)** to about 2,000 to 3,000 mg a day. Ask whether a fluid limit applies to you.
- **Remain active** and ask about cardiac rehabilitation.
- **Take medications daily** and bring an up-to-date list to every appointment.

5 Things to avoid

- **Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** such as ibuprofen and naproxen, which cause fluid retention. Ask your pharmacist about safer pain relief.
- **Smoking and excessive alcohol.**
- **Missed vaccinations:** stay up to date, including the annual influenza vaccine.

Sources: CCS/CHFS heart failure guidelines: 2017 comprehensive update, 2021 update (reduced EF), 2025 update (EF above 40%), Can J Cardiol. Alberta Health Services, Heart failure weight chart.
This guide is general information and does not replace advice from your healthcare provider.

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