



Heart Failure

Chest
Heart &
Stroke

What is heart failure?

Heart failure is a medical condition which means the heart is not able to pump effectively. In simple terms, the heart is a muscular pump, and its job is to pump blood around the body. To do this it needs to contract and relax. Heart failure happens when the heart does not contract or relax as well as it should.

What are the symptoms of heart failure?

The main symptoms of heart failure include:

- Breathlessness**
- Exhaustion**
- Swollen ankles**

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms you should contact your GP as soon as possible. This is important because if you do have heart failure, the sooner it is diagnosed, the sooner you can get started on the correct treatment and get the right care.

What causes heart failure?

The causes of heart failure include damage to the heart muscle after a heart attack, an abnormal heart rhythm, high blood pressure, or problems with the valves in the heart. Congenital heart disease (a condition present from birth), or cardiomyopathy (disease of the heart muscle) are other causes. It can also be caused by a virus or inflammation, and in some cases, a cause cannot be determined.

These causes can damage or put extra strain on the heart over a long period of time. The heart initially tries to cope with the extra workload by getting bigger, developing more muscle, or beating faster to keep up with demand, but eventually it fails to cope, and symptoms become evident.

What is the treatment for heart failure?

Heart failure is a long-term condition which cannot be cured but treatment can help to control the symptoms, improve quality of life, and slow the progression of the condition. Treatment can include:



Medication - this can be prescribed to protect and enhance heart function, alleviate symptoms, and reduce fluid retention. Medications are usually started by specialist heart failure nurses who are experts in getting heart failure patients on the correct medication, at the correct doses for them.



Cardiac rehabilitation - delivered by specialist nurses and physiotherapists, cardiac rehabilitation can help patients safely increase their activity levels, improving fitness and quality of life.



Lifestyle changes - specialist heart failure nurses can give advice about lifestyle changes that can help, such as stopping smoking, alcohol intake, diet, weight management, keeping active, and getting seasonal vaccinations.

What are the outcomes for people with heart failure?

It does sound frightening, but having heart failure does not mean that your heart is about to stop working. It can be difficult to determine how heart failure will progress for an individual, as different people are affected very differently.

Early detection of heart failure and receiving the right treatment can improve outcomes and give patients the best outlook however, helping people live better for longer with this chronic condition.

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Support from Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke

At Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke we understand that being diagnosed with heart failure can be extremely frightening for you and your family. Our experienced and compassionate Care Services team are here to help and support you and our services include:



Family Support Service -

This will give the personalised information and advice you and your family need as you navigate life with heart failure.



Heart Strong Cardiac Education Programme -

This is designed to help participants learn more about their health and take the steps needed to move forward post diagnosis.



Taking Control Self-Management Programme -

This provides a range of skills which will help you to manage your long-term condition better and improve your confidence.



Scan to watch our heart failure educational video series and real life stories.



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