



About Heart Failure

You can feel better when you have heart failure by taking your medicines as your doctor tells you to. Know what things you can do every day to stay healthy, what signs to watch for, and when to call a doctor.

What is heart failure?

Heart failure means that your heart muscle does not pump as much blood as your body needs. Failure does not mean that your heart has stopped. It means that it is not pumping as well as it should.

Because your heart cannot pump well it holds on to salt and water. Your heart beats faster. Your heart gets bigger.

Then fluids start to build up in your body, and you have symptoms like feeling weak and out of breath.

Heart failure usually gets worse over time. However, treatment can slow the disease and help you feel better and live longer.

What causes heart failure?

Anything that damages your heart or affects how well it pumps can lead to heart failure. Common causes of heart failure are:

- High blood pressure
- Heart attack
- Coronary artery disease

Other conditions that can lead to heart failure include:

- Diabetes
- Diseases of the heart muscle
- Heart valve disease
- Disease of the sac around the heart
- A slow, fast, or uneven heart rhythm
- A heart problem that you were born with
- Long-term alcohol abuse

What are the symptoms?

In the early stages, you may:

- Feel tired easily
- Feel like your heart is pounding or racing (palpitations)
- Be short of breath when you exert yourself
- Feel weak or dizzy

As heart failure gets worse, fluid starts to build up in your lungs and other parts of your body. This may cause you to:

- Feel short of breath even at rest
- Have swelling (edema), especially in your legs, ankles, and feet
- Gain weight. This may happen over just a day or two, or more slowly
- Cough or wheeze, especially when you lie down
- Need to urinate more at night
- Feel bloated or sick to your stomach

If your symptoms suddenly get worse, you will need emergency care.

How is it treated?

Most people with heart failure need to take several medicines. Your doctor may prescribe medicines to:

- Help keep heart failure from getting worse. These drugs include ACE inhibitors, angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARBs), beta-blockers, and vasodilators like hydralazine and nitroglycerin.
- Reduce symptoms so you feel better. These drugs include diuretics (water pills), digoxin, and potassium.
- Treat the cause of your heart failure.

It is very important to take your medicines exactly as your doctor tells you to. If you don't, your heart failure could get worse.

Care at home

Lifestyle changes are an important part of treatment. They can help slow down heart failure. They may also help control other diseases that make heart failure worse, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and coronary artery disease.

The best steps you can take are to:

- **Eat less salt (sodium).** Sodium causes your body to retain water and makes it harder for your heart to pump. Your doctor may also ask you to limit how much fluid you drink.
- **Get regular exercise.** Your doctor can tell you what level of exercise is safe for you, how to check your pulse, and how to know if you are doing too much.
- **Take rest breaks during the day.**
- **Lose weight if you are overweight.** Even a few pounds can make a difference.
- **Stop smoking.** Smoking damages your heart and makes exercise harder to do.
- **Limit alcohol.** Ask your doctor how much, if any, is safe.

To stay as healthy as possible, work closely with your doctor. Have all your tests, and go to all your appointments. It is also important to:

- Talk to your doctor before you take any new medicine, including nonprescription and prescription drugs, vitamins, and herbs. Some of them may make your heart failure worse.
- Keep track of your symptoms. Weigh yourself at the same time every day, and write down your weight. Call your doctor if you have a sudden weight gain, a change in your ability to exercise, or any sudden change in your symptoms.

To get more information about Magellan Complete Care please call us toll-free at 800-327-8613 or 800-424-1694 (TTY only). Or you can call Florida Medicaid Choice Counselors at 877-711-3662 or 866-467-4970 (TTY only).