



Heart Failure Programme Patient Handbook

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Preface

The Heart Failure Multidisciplinary Team at Ng Teng Fong General Hospital (NTFGH) provides a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach to help patients manage heart failure. Patients will be taught self-care management skills (or strategies) on how to look after themselves, and how to recognise signs and symptoms of fluid retention.

Our dedicated team of cardiologists, cardiology specialty nurses, and clinical pharmacists will see you in the clinic to adjust your medications, remove the excess fluid in your body and make you less breathless.

If you have any concerns, please discuss with them and they can refer you accordingly.



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Commonly Asked Questions

+ How does my heart work?

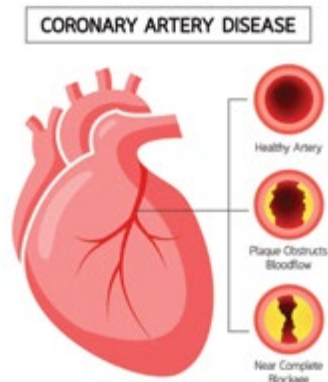
The heart is a muscular pump that delivers blood filled with oxygen to the body.

+ What is heart failure?

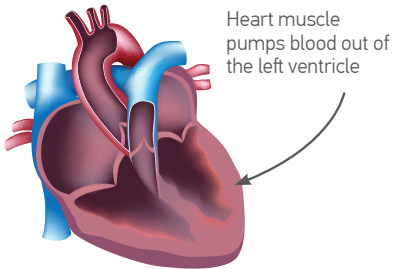
It is when the heart muscle does not pump blood as well as it should. When this happens, blood often backs up and fluid can build up in the lungs, causing shortness of breath and swollen legs.

+ What are the causes of heart failure?

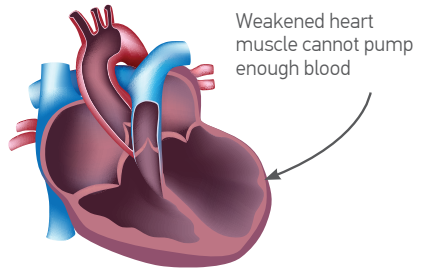
- Heart attack
- Narrowing of the blood vessels in the heart known as coronary artery disease
- High blood pressure
- Inflammation of the heart muscle
- Heart valve diseases
- Thyroid problems
- Irregular heart rhythm
- High consumption of alcohol



Normal



Heart Failure



+ How do I know the pump function of my heart?

Your doctor will arrange for a test called "echo" to assess the pump function of your heart. A normal pump function is more than 50%.

+ What are the signs and symptoms of heart failure?

- Shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing when lying flat in bed
 - Shortness of breath occurs when fluid backs up into the lungs (congestion) or when your body does not have enough oxygen-rich blood to let you go on with your activity or exercise without rest.



Even though you associate breathing with a lung problem, your heart condition can also cause shortness of breath. In some cases, the symptoms can cause you to wake up suddenly at night and disrupt your normal sleep pattern.

- Coughing or wheezing, especially when you exercise or lie down
- Tiredness, because the heart is not pumping enough oxygen-rich blood to major organs and muscles

- Swelling of the legs
- Weight gain
- Rapid/irregular heart beats
 - When the heart muscles do not pump well, the heartbeat speeds up to help the heart get enough oxygen-rich blood to major organs and muscles, or the heartbeat may become abnormal.



+ How is it treated?

- Your doctor will give you medicine to strengthen your heart and water pills to get rid of excess fluids
- A low-salt diet will be recommended
- The amount of water you consume is monitored
- Surgery or heart devices may be required

+ What can I do to manage heart failure?

- Follow your doctor's advice
- Take your medicine regularly to keep your condition under control



- Side effects of medications

Some patients may experience low blood pressure in the form of dizziness and fainting spells, while others may feel tired and lethargic. These symptoms usually do not persist. The medications may also affect the kidneys and the potassium level in the blood.

To monitor for these side effects, your blood pressure, heart rate, and blood tests for your kidney function and potassium level will be monitored regularly to ensure your body is responding well to the medications.

- Weigh yourself daily to check for weight gain
 - Gaining weight is an early sign that you are retaining extra fluid in your body.

Weigh yourself every day. A good time is after you have emptied your bladder in the morning and before you eat or drink.

Keep a record so that the doctor and you know your weight trend.

See your doctor if your weight increases by more than 2kg in three days, breathlessness worsens, or legs start to swell.



- Eat less salt
 - Reducing your salt intake will also help reduce fluid retention.

We recommend as little salt as possible by avoiding adding salt to your food. Salt is already commonly found elsewhere in our diet.

Choose fresh produce. When cooking, use alternatives to reduce the amount of salt you use. Limit sauces, mixes and instant products. Cut down on processed food like preserved meats and savoury snacks.



- Quit smoking
- Exercise regularly

- Walking is a simple exercise that does not require equipment and it can be done with family members and friends. To benefit from a walking exercise, do so at a moderate pace. Physical activity can also be achieved by taking leisure walks at the park, market, or shopping centre. Walk as much as you can. It is recommended that you do 150 minutes of moderate physical activity every week.



- Reduce your fluid intake

- You will have to limit the fluid you consume to avoid overloading your heart. This means you have to keep an eye on your fluid intake throughout the day. Keep to 1.2L per day. This includes all liquids such as coffee, tea, juices, soup, and porridge.



- Keep to your regular follow-up appointment

- The doctor will monitor your condition and progress, including adjusting and tailoring of medications for you.

Your type and dosing of heart failure medications may be changed at short intervals initially. This does not mean that your condition is deteriorating. These adjustments are meant to optimise the way your heart functions, so that you feel your best.



+ What is my dry weight?

Dry weight is the weight of your body without "extra fluid" build-up in your body because of heart failure.

Therefore, it is important to weigh yourself every morning, before breakfast and after passing urine.

Visit your General Practitioner (GP) if you notice weight gain of more than 1kg a day or 3kg a week.

+ How much salt can I consume?

We recommend no more than 2g (1 teaspoon) of salt per day. Avoid foods high in salt content such as salted eggs, fish, preserved vegetables, and canned foods. Be watchful of hidden salt content in processed foods and snacks.

+ Can I exercise with heart failure?

Yes, you may join our exercise programme tailored especially for heart failure patients.

+ **My heart is weak, can I engage in sexual activity?**

Generally, you can continue with normal sexual activities but do not have sex if you are feeling breathless or tired. Ask your doctor during your visit.

+ **What should I do if I have difficulty breathing?**

- If you notice breathing in difficulty especially when lying down, this can mean there is water in the lungs. You should go to a Polyclinic or GP to see a doctor.
- Please proceed to the Emergency Department after office hours. Depending on your condition, you may be admitted for further observation.

+ **What should I watch out for?**

- Weight gain of more than 1kg (2 to 3 pounds) a day
- Swelling in the feet/ankles
- Difficulty in breathing
- Unable to lie down flat and feel better when sitting up, or needing more pillows than usual

+ **Do I need a heart device implanted in my body?**

This will depend on your heart condition. Your doctor will advise you. There are two common devices known as Cardiac Resynchronisation Therapy (CRT) and Implantable Cardioverter Defibrillator (ICD). CRT helps the right and left chambers of your heart pump better while ICD helps to manage the life-threatening rhythms of your heart.

+ **Do I require any vaccinations and why?**

People with underlying heart failure are at a higher risk of infections such as flu, pneumonia, and their associated complications. You are recommended to get a yearly influenza vaccination. Pneumococcal vaccination is taken once, although a booster dose may be required every 5 years.



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