



Heart failure

1. This refers to your heart not pumping blood efficiently rather than your heart stopping. How do you prevent heart failure turning into a heart attack?

Heart failure can be caused by a number of conditions including the aforementioned cardiomyopathy. There are two types of cardiac failure known as heart failure with reduced ejection fraction, either due to a prior heart-attack damaging the heart muscle or a dilated cardiomyopathy.

The second type is known as heart failure with preserved ejection fraction. In this condition, the heart is pumping well but not relaxing properly so the person can still present with the symptoms and signs of cardiac failure such as shortness of breath and evidence of fluid overload.

A heart attack is where plaque is ruptured in the coronary arteries leading to a clot forming and the artery blocking. In certain cases, especially if the person does not seek urgent medical attention, the heart muscle may be irreparably damaged and in a number of cases the affected person may even go into cardiac arrest, which is where the heart stops beating.

2. When blood isn't flowing properly, it can lead to a build-up of fluid that shows up in other parts of the body, in lungs it causes shortness of breath, in the feet it's swelling. How do you reduce fluid build-up?

In a person with known cardiac failure, it is important to weigh yourself first thing in the morning after emptying your bladder as this is the best way to determine total body fluid. When you are not thirsty and your legs are not swollen we consider this to be ideal body weight.

People with known cardiac failure should also restrict their fluid and salt intake. You should have no more than 1500mls of fluid per day and do not add salt to food. If there is evidence of fluid build-up in the body, pharmaceutical drugs known as diuretics are highly effective in helping reduce accumulated fluid.

3. Why is the relationship and fluid important?

If your weight is dropping acutely you need more fluid, but if your weight is increasing rapidly you need more diuretic. Regardless, this needs to be reported immediately to your treating doctor.



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4. Is heart failure always associated with another cause of heart disease, eg cardiomyopathy, arrhythmia etc?

Depending on the type of heart failure (see above), the cause will depend on the underlying diagnosis. But, there is always a cause for the heart failure and treatment directed at the cause will help the underlying condition.

5. How can Cardiac Rehabilitation Programs help patients manage heart failure?

Cardiac rehabilitation or Heart Wellness programs are appropriate for all people with any form of cardiac disease. In people with heart failure, a supervised programme which improves all aspects of lifestyle, addresses the risk factors for heart disease, supervises the person's medications and supplement therapies. It also helps manage specific issues such as when to return to work, driving, sexual activity and help with quitting addictions.

I believe these types of programs should be also offered to any person at high risk for heart disease to help prevent this in the first place.

6. Certain literature says women more likely to experience depression in conjunction with heart failure. In your experience, is this the case?

Depression is a major factor in the generation of all forms of heart disease and is not peculiar to women or patients with heart failure. But, serious physical illnesses can also affect a variety of brain chemicals and reduce the person's desire to lead a healthy lifestyle, thus, exacerbating both depression and heart failure.