

# Heart Failure with a Weak Heart

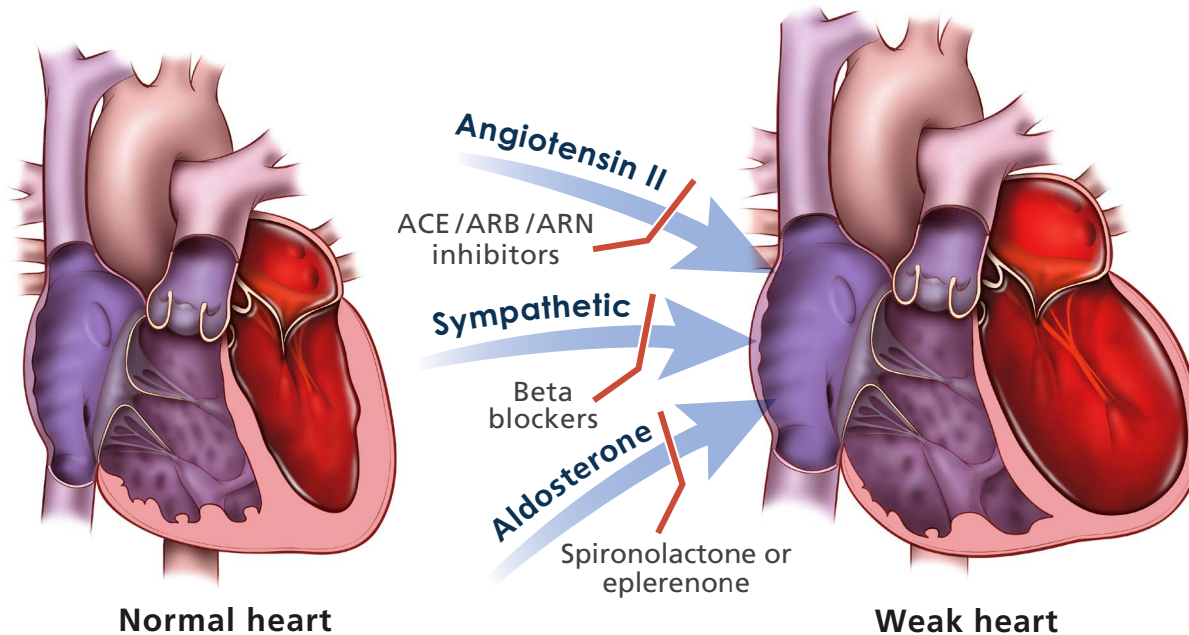
With heart failure, initial damage **weakens** the heart muscle.



To make up for it, the body releases stress hormones, causing your heart to beat faster and to **enlarge** (stretch or thicken).



This causes poor forward flow and fluid back-up, which causes **symptoms** (fatigue, trouble concentrating, swelling, shortness of breath).



**Medicines** can help the heart by:

- Blocking hormones
- Lowering the workload
- Strengthening the pumping action

**A healthier heart:**

- Decreases your chance for hospitalization
- Improves survival
- Allows you to live a healthier life

**Manage excess fluid by taking medicines (diuretics) and practicing MAWDS every day**

## Summary of Your Heart Condition

**Heart failure**

A weak heart muscle has an ejection fraction (EF) of less than 40% (normal is 55–70%)

Your EF is: \_\_\_\_\_

**Coronary artery disease**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Rhythm abnormality**

- Atrial
- Ventricular

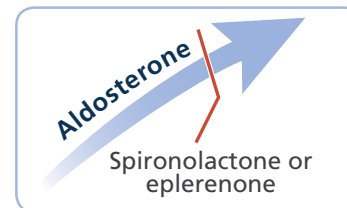
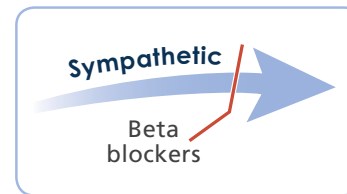
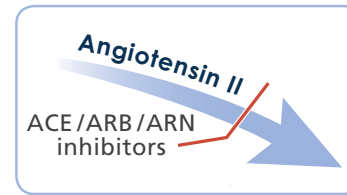
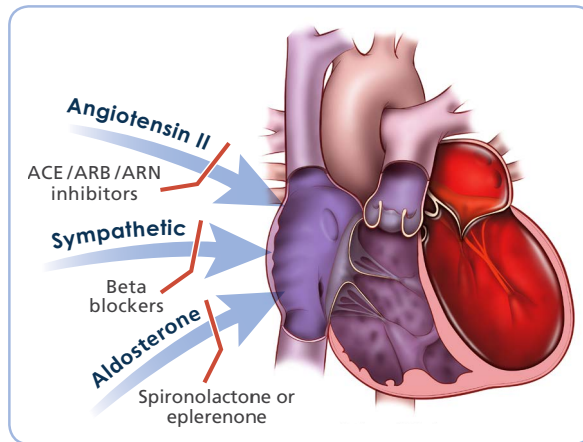
**Other**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

# Heart Failure with a Weak Heart

The medical term for a weak heart muscle is **systolic** [sis-TAH-lik] **heart failure** or **HFrEF** (Heart Failure with Reduced Ejection Fraction). This basically means that your heart muscle is damaged and weak and can't pump as much blood as it should. Your body tries to make up for it by activating 3 hormone systems. The medical term for this action is called a **neurohormonal** [nu-roh-hor-MONE-uhl] **response**. These hormone systems release chemicals called **stress hormones**. Stress hormones make your heart beat faster and your body retain fluid, which enlarges the heart muscle. This cycle makes the heart become larger and weaker, and heart failure symptoms develop.

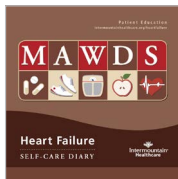
Three different types of medicines are used to stop this cycle and block stress hormones. Look at the picture of the heart at right and on the other side of this sheet. The blue arrows in the picture represent the stress hormones, and the red lines are the medicines that block them.



- **ACE / ARB / ARN inhibitors** are medicines that help block angiotensin [an-gee-oh-TEN-sin] II, a hormone in the renin family that constricts the blood vessels. ACEI/ARBI/ARNIs expand the blood vessels and decrease resistance. This lowers blood pressure and helps your heart work better overall.
- **Beta blockers** are medicines that block the action of the sympathetic nervous system, which increases your heart rate. Beta blockers help slow the rate and force of your heartbeat.
- **Spironolactone** [Spy-ron-oh-LACK-tone] and **eplerenone** [ep-LAIR-eh-nohn] block aldosterone, a hormone that regulates salt and water in your body. These medicines help your kidneys get rid of extra fluid that builds up in the lungs, ankles, and feet while helping your body retain potassium. This reduces strain on your heart.

While all of these medicines are commonly used to treat high blood pressure, they are lifesaving for people with heart failure because they block the body's stress response and let the heart recover. The less stress on the heart muscle, the better it works.

**Taking these 3 types of medication and practicing your MAWDS plan every day are the keys to staying out of the hospital, and living a longer, fuller life.**



For more information on these medicines, see [page 4](#) of your *MAWDS Heart Failure Self-Care Diary*.