Managing Heart Failure (HF)

What is HF?

Your heart is a muscle that pumps oxygen-rich blood to your body. Heart failure means the heart cannot pump blood as well as it should. When this happens, blood does not move forward easily, and fluid can build up in the body. This can cause:

- Shortness of breath
- Feeling very tired or weak
- Swelling in the ankles, legs, feet, or belly
- Trouble thinking clearly or remembering

Fluid can also build up in the lungs. This is called congestive heart failure. When this happens, parts of the body may not get enough oxygen, which leads to these symptoms.

My EF is: _____

How is HF measured?

Your healthcare provider may talk about ejection fraction (EF). EF shows how well your heart pumps blood. EF is the percent of blood pushed out of the left side of the heart with each beat.

- A normal EF is 50% to 70%
- Mildly reduced EF is 41-49%
- A reduced EF is 40% or less

How do medications help me manage heart failure?

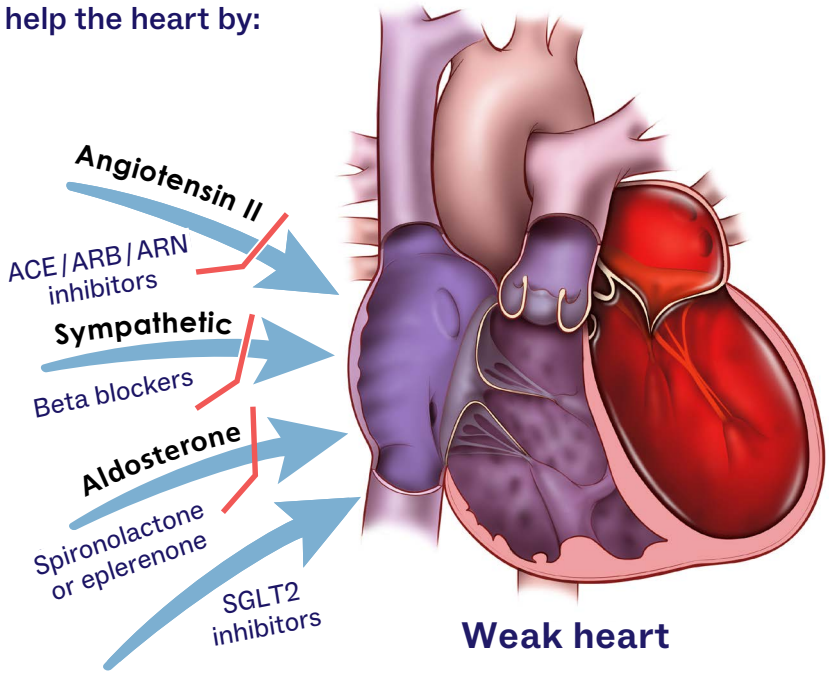
Heart failure medicines help you:

- Feel better and have more energy
- Help your heart work better
- Stay out of the hospital
- Reduce shortness of breath and swelling
- Improve blood flow to your body
- Protect other organs
- Lower the risk of heart attack or death

Heart failure medications can help the heart by:

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

Take your medications every day and never skip doses. Contact your health provider if you experience symptoms such as low blood pressure or increased fatigue.



Know your medications

If you have heart failure (HF), your care team will recommend taking several medications. Your healthcare provider will choose the best mix for you. They will work together to help your heart. It is important to know:

- Which medicines you take
- How often you take them

The 4 main types of HF medications:

If you have a reduced EF (40% or less), you usually need 4 kinds of medications. These are called the 4 "pillars" of heart failure treatment.

1. **ACE inhibitors, ARB, or ARNI medicines.** (Examples: ACEs: lisinopril, quinapril; ARBs: losartan, valsartan; ARNI: Entresto®)
   - These help reduce stress on the heart and make it easier for the heart to pump.
   - ACE inhibitors help the heart pump better and may improve its shape over time.
   - ARBs work like ACE inhibitors. Used if someone cannot take an ACE inhibitor (for example, if it causes a bad cough).
   - ARNI combines an ARB with another medicine. It helps relax blood vessels and helps the body get rid of extra salt and fluid.
2. **Beta-blockers.** (Examples: metoprolol, carvedilol) These help the heart work less hard. Over time, they can make the heart stronger and help it pump better.
3. **Sodium-glucose cotransporter-2 (SGLT-2) inhibitors.** (Examples: Jardiance®, Farxiga®) These help people with any type of heart failure. They help the kidneys remove extra sugar, salt, and water from the body. This reduces strain on the heart and helps it work more efficiently.
4. **Aldosterone blockers.** (Example: spironolactone, eplerenone) These help control hormones in the body. They help the kidneys remove extra salt and water, which lowers swelling and reduces stress on the heart.

Many of these medications are traditionally used to treat high blood pressure, but you are taking them to help your heart muscle.

You may also be given:

- **Diuretics (water pills).** (Examples: furosemide/Lasix®, bumetanide/Bumex®, torsemide/Demadex®) These help your body get rid of extra salt and water. This reduces swelling, especially in the ankles, and can help you breathe better if fluid builds up in the lungs. With less fluid to pump, your heart does not have to work as hard. A common side effect is needing to urinate more often.

  Some diuretics can lower potassium, while others help keep potassium in your body. Having the right potassium level is important for a normal heart rhythm. Your healthcare provider will tell you:

  - If you need potassium supplements or potassium-rich foods
  - Which type of diuretic you are taking
  - How often you need blood tests to check potassium levels

If taking a diuretic: Call your care team if you gain 2 to 3 pounds overnight or 5 pounds in one week, or you have symptoms of fluid retention, such as swelling in the feet or hands.

Tips for taking your medicines

Do

- Take your meds at the same time every day
- Ask questions if instructions are not clear
- Keep an updated medication list

Don't

- Skip doses
- Take double doses if you miss a dose
- Run out of your medications
- Stop a medication without talking to your care team

Continue taking your medications even if your heart function improves and you feel better. Stopping may cause worsening heart failure.

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