

HEART FAILURE

What is it?

Heart failure is a chronic condition in which the heart's muscle is weakened and unable to pump blood efficiently. This inefficiency leads to insufficient blood flow to meet the body's needs for oxygen and nutrients, which can cause fatigue, shortness of breath, and fluid retention.

What causes it?

Heart failure can result from several underlying conditions, including coronary artery disease (blockages in the heart's arteries), high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attacks, and cardiomyopathy (disease of the heart muscle). These conditions damage or overwork the heart muscle, leading to its gradual weakening.

What are the symptoms?

- Shortness of breath, particularly during physical activity or while lying down.
- Fatigue and weakness.
- Swelling in the legs, ankles, and feet (edema).
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat.
- Persistent cough or wheezing with white or pink blood-tinged phlegm.
- Increased need to urinate at night.
- Difficulty concentrating or decreased alertness.

What are the preventive measures?

Preventive measures include maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, reducing salt intake, avoiding smoking and excess alcohol, managing stress, and controlling blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes.

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis involves a physical exam, blood tests, ECG, echocardiogram, chest X-ray, MRI or CT scan, and a stress test.

How is it treated?

Treatment for heart failure typically includes:

- Medications such as ACE inhibitors, beta-blockers, diuretics, and others that help improve heart function and manage symptoms.
- Lifestyle changes, including dietary modifications, regular physical activity, and smoking cessation.
- Medical devices like pacemakers or implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICDs) for patients with severe heart rhythm problems.
- Surgery, such as coronary artery bypass grafting or heart valve repair/replacement, in certain cases.
- Cardiac rehabilitation programs to help patients manage their condition and improve their quality of life.