DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE
Managing Heart Failure

Heart failure can result from many different kinds of heart disease, so it’s important for you and your doctor to work together closely to optimize your medical treatment. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know
Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here’s what they mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dyspnea</td>
<td>The medical name for shortness of breath. In people with heart failure, dyspnea is most often caused when the lungs become congested with excess fluid. Dyspnea is usually the most prominent symptom experienced by a person with heart failure.</td>
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<td>Peripheral Edema</td>
<td>Swelling of the feet, ankles, and legs. Worsening peripheral edema suggests that heart failure may also be worsening, and that treatment adjustments may be needed.</td>
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<td>Pulmonary Edema</td>
<td>A condition characterized by severe dyspnea, coughing, and, often, frothing at the mouth, and is a medical emergency. It is caused by excess fluid in the air sacs of the lungs. In people with heart failure, pulmonary edema usually indicates that pressures within the heart are excessively high.</td>
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<td>Congestive Heart Failure</td>
<td>The term used when pulmonary congestion is the most prominent symptom of heart failure.</td>
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<td>Dilated Cardiomyopathy</td>
<td>A condition in which the heart muscle becomes weakened, and in response the heart dilates. Dilated cardiomyopathy is the most common cause of heart failure.</td>
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<td>Low-Output Heart Failure</td>
<td>The inability of the heart to pump sufficient blood out to the tissues, which produces severe weakness and fatigue.</td>
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<td>Diastolic Dysfunction</td>
<td>Refers to relatively “stiff” heart muscle, which makes it difficult for the heart to fill with blood in between heartbeats. Severe diastolic dysfunction can lead to diastolic heart failure, where the poor cardiac filling leads to elevated cardiac pressures, and subsequently to pulmonary congestion.</td>
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<td>Ventricular Hypertrophy</td>
<td>Refers to an abnormal thickening of the heart muscle in the left and/or right ventricle. Hypertrophy is one cause of diastolic dysfunction.</td>
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<td>Ejection Fraction (EF)</td>
<td>The left ventricular ejection fraction is the proportion of blood within the left ventricle that is ejected with each heartbeat. A normal ejection fraction is greater than 0.4. A depressed ejection fraction indicates that the heart muscle has weakened, and the heart has begun to dilate in response.</td>
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Questions to Ask
These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage heart failure.

About Symptoms
- My symptoms vary quite a bit from day to day. What changes in my symptoms should I look for to know whether to call you for advice?
- What symptoms should I look for that might tell me I’m doing too much?
- What changes in symptoms should cause me to go to the emergency department or call 911?

About Causes & Risk Factors
- What are we doing to reverse the underlying cause of my heart failure?
- What should I be doing to keep the underlying cause of my heart failure from worsening?
- What is my ejection fraction, and what can we do that might improve it?
- I understand that staying active is important. How far should I push myself, and what should I watch out for to know I am doing too much?
- Would a cardiac rehabilitation program help me to keep as active as possible, and do it safely?
- Can you help me with a good smoking cessation program?
- Will you send me to a dietician to help me begin a diet tailored to a person with my kind of heart failure?

About Diagnosis
- What is the underlying cardiac condition that caused my heart failure?
- Have we done all the testing necessary to make sure we know what caused my heart failure?
- Would you say that my heart failure is the congestive type, or the diastolic dysfunction type?
About Treatment

- You have me on several medications. Should I take them all at once or space them out?
- What side effects do you want me to watch out for?
- What should I do if I forget to take a dose of one of my medicines?
- Am I a candidate for a pacemaker, implantable defibrillator, or cardiac resynchronization device?
- Is there a type of surgery or invasive procedure that might improve my condition?

About Coping and Living With Heart Failure

- How often and what time of day should I weigh myself to monitor for excess fluid accumulation?
- What degree of change in my weight should I notify you about?
- What limitations do I have on my activities?
- Should I keep a daily journal to tabulate my symptoms and my weight, to help detect long-term trends that might be important?
- Should I have a home blood pressure device, and how often should I use it?
- Will you talk to my loved ones about helping me stick to a good diet and a good activity level, and about what to watch out for?