



About heart failure



Heart failure is a long-term condition. However, it can be well managed and many people with heart failure live very full and active lives.

If you learn about and understand heart failure,

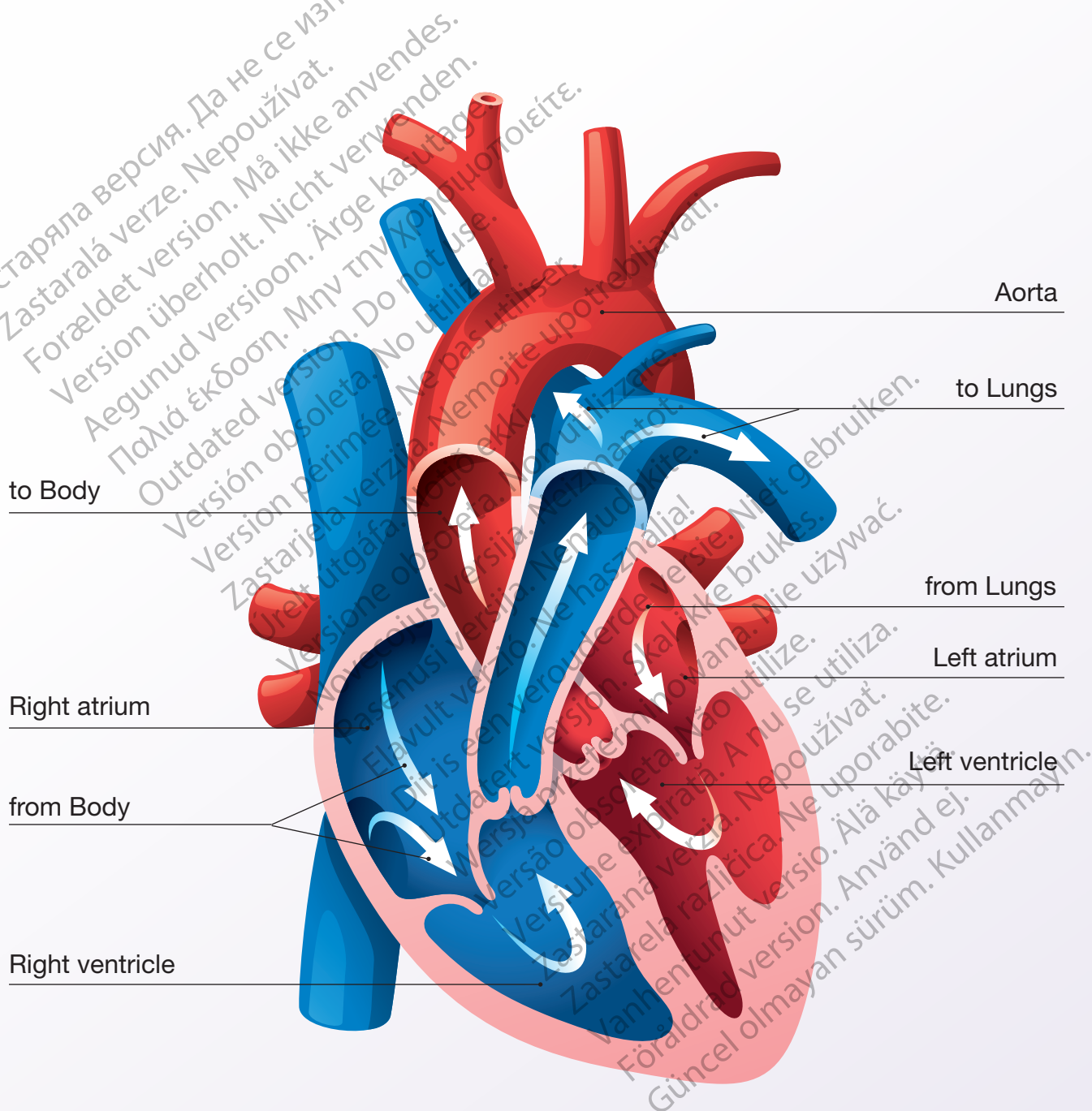
this makes it much easier for you to work alongside your healthcare team to effectively manage your condition, control your symptoms and enjoy the best possible quality of life.



How your heart works

In order to understand heart failure, you need to know how your heart works.

Your heart has two sides, the left and right. Your heart also has four valves, which make sure blood flows in the correct direction. When your heart pumps blood around your body it takes blood in through the right side and sends it to the lungs. Then, the oxygenated blood goes back into the left side of the heart, and from there the heart pumps it to all parts of your body.





What is heart failure?

If you have heart failure, this means that your heart pumps blood around your body less efficiently than normal. Because the heart does not pump the blood and oxygen efficiently all around the body, the heart tries to work harder to compensate which can further weaken it.

Some people worry that heart failure means their heart is going to suddenly stop working — but this is not the case. Heart failure is a long-term condition, which means that most people have to manage it for many years — it does not just go away.

You may find that you feel better on some days than on others. Some people with heart failure experience acute events. These are episodes when the patient's symptoms suddenly become much worse than normal and make them feel very unwell. Often, these episodes are treated effectively by healthcare professionals and the patient recovers.



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What causes heart failure?

Lots of things can cause heart failure. Common causes include:

- **Coronary artery disease (narrowing of the heart's major arteries by fatty deposits called plaques)**
- **High blood pressure**
- **Heart muscle disease**
- **Heart valve disease**
- **Poor lifestyle choice such as use of alcohol.**

On rare occasions it may not be possible to find out why a person has heart failure. The cause may remain a mystery.





What happens when you have heart failure?

There are many different signs and symptoms of heart failure, and they can vary from person to person. Symptoms can also develop over time. That is another reason why having a good understanding of heart failure is useful; you will know what to look out for, and what to do if anything changes.

There are many symptoms of heart failure, but some are particularly common. These include:

COMMON SYMPTOMS^{1a}

TYPICAL

- **Shortness of breath**, particularly when you are active or lying down.
- **Lack of energy, or fatigue**. This is very common in heart failure and can be particularly bad when you have completed just a small amount of activity, and when you are resting.
- **Swelling**. Also known as oedema, this is most likely to affect your ankles and feet but may extend to your legs, and groin.

LESS TYPICAL

- **Cough**
- **Wheezing**
- **Weight Gain**
- **Weight Loss**
- **Bloated Feeling**
- **Loss of Appetite**
- **Confusion**
- **Depression**
- **Palpitations**
- **Dizziness or Passing Out**

Many of these symptoms are caused by your heart failing to pump as well as normal. This can cause blood to build up between the heart and the lungs and sometimes elsewhere in your body. This is often called 'congestion', and you may hear your doctor refer to 'congestive heart failure'. When congestion occurs, the heart tries to work even harder, to get rid of the back-up of blood,

but cannot clear it all. This causes extra fluid to build up, which can be seen in the form of swelling, and sometimes as sudden weight gain. Congestion in the lungs may cause problems with breathing, and if there is not enough blood and oxygen coming to the muscles, it can cause weakness and lack of energy.

Many of the symptoms of heart disease can be managed, so it is a good idea to talk regularly with a doctor or nurse about your symptoms.

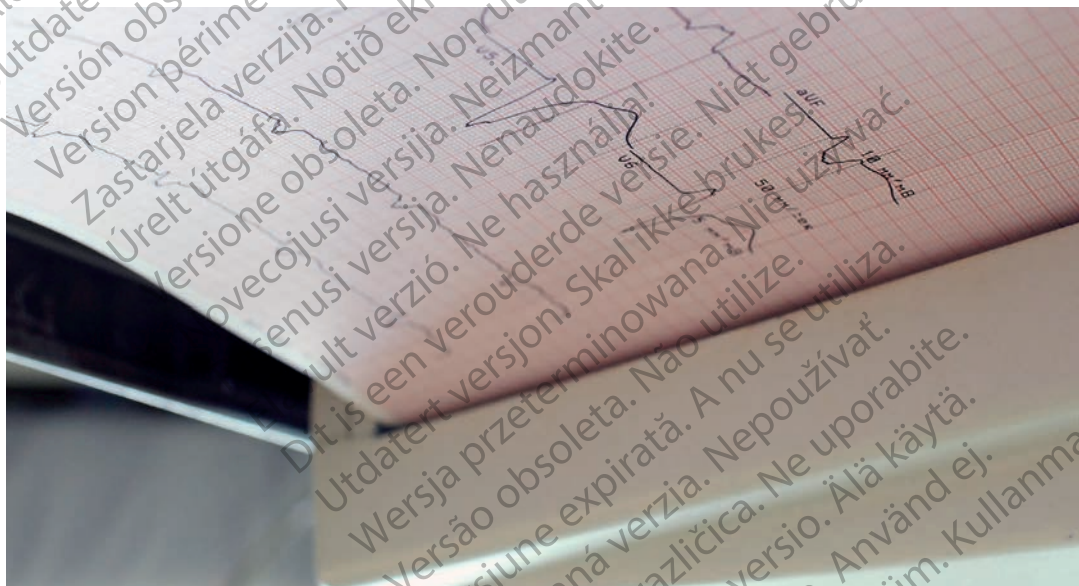


Changes in symptoms can signal a change in your heart health, so it is always important to report any symptom changes (or new symptoms) to a member of your healthcare team.



The diagnosis and classification of heart failure

If you have already been formally diagnosed with heart failure, you have probably had several tests and assessments. These may include some or all of: blood tests; chest X-rays; electrocardiogram (ECG) and echocardiogram.



You may already have started treatment and begun to manage your symptoms. You may, therefore, feel quite well at the moment. However, if you have been diagnosed with heart failure you absolutely must follow your treatment plan and symptom monitoring steps, just as members of your healthcare team have told you. This program can help you with that.

Doctors may classify the extent of your heart failure, based on your physical capability. To do this, many doctors use the New York Heart Association's functional classification^{1b}. This grades heart failure into four classes, which are:

Class 1

No limitation of physical activity. Ordinary physical activity does not cause undue breathlessness, fatigue or palpitations.

Class 2

Slight limitation of physical activity. Comfortable at rest, but ordinary physical activity results in undue breathlessness, fatigue or palpitations.

Class 3

Marked limitation of physical activity. Comfortable at rest, but less than ordinary physical activity results in undue breathlessness, fatigue or palpitations.

Class 4

Unable to carry out any physical activity without discomfort. Symptoms at rest can be present. If any physical activity is undertaken, discomfort is increased.



Although heart failure is a long-term condition, there are plenty of things you can do to help yourself manage your symptoms and enjoy a better quality of life. Make sure to use the information and tips we have given you to take care of yourself at home – if you have any questions please reach out to your healthcare team.

If you happen to have an urgent medical concern, please call your doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call your local Emergency Contact number. Remember, your doctor is your primary source for information on your condition and treatment. Be sure to speak with them if you have any questions or concerns.

References

1. McMurray JJ, Adamopoulos S, Anker SD et al. ESC guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic heart failure 2012: The Task Force for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Acute and Chronic Heart Failure 2012 of the European Society of Cardiology. Developed in collaboration with the Heart Failure Association (HFA) of the ESC. *Eur J Heart Fail*. 2012;14(8):803-69.
 - a. p811/Table 4
 - b. p853/Table 27