

Talking with your doctor about heart failure: A guide to productive doctor appointments

When you visit your doctor, it's best to follow a "do ask, do tell" policy. Make sure that you ask questions about anything that you do not understand fully. Remember, there are no stupid questions and no wrong answers.

The following list of questions can help you get the information you need to keep yourself or your loved one on track with a recommended treatment plan.



- What's my diagnosis? Is the heart failure mild, moderate, or severe?
- How is the condition likely to progress?
- What likely caused my heart failure? How will those things be treated?
- What are the most important things I can do to manage this condition?
- What are some ways my daily life will change?
- Can I still work, play golf, have sex, babysit my grandkids, do yard work? (Fill in whatever activity you're wondering about.)
- What strategies and resources are there for lifestyle changes I need to make, such as eating better, increasing exercise, quitting smoking, etc.?
- What happens if I can't make a recommended lifestyle change?
- Should I enroll in a cardiac rehabilitation program to strengthen my heart? If so, can you tell me what that involves?
- What do each of the medications I'm prescribed do to treat my heart condition?
- What side effects should I watch for with each medication I'm prescribed?
- Can any of the heart failure medicines interact with other medicines or supplements I take?
- If a particular medicine is causing side effects that are hard to manage, is there a way to relieve them? Is there another equally good medicine that might be an option?
- I am having trouble keeping the medication schedule straight. Is there any way I can simplify my schedule?
- What should I do if symptoms get worse or change suddenly?

Your doctor will also rely on you to share information and to keep track of your symptoms between office visits. That way, you can make decisions together about when your treatment needs to be adjusted or changed. Call your doctor right away if you notice any of the following:

- Weight gain of more than a couple pounds within a day
- Sudden swelling in your legs, ankles, feet, or abdomen
- Trouble sleeping (waking up short of breath, needing more pillows to sleep comfortably)
- Increased fatigue or shortness of breath

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