

Importance of early diagnosis

Early diagnosis and treatment are very important and can help people who have heart failure live longer, more active lives. However, awareness of heart failure in Ireland is low – most people don't recognise the symptoms and the majority wait at least a week before going to their doctor.



Treatment & prevention

Heart Failure is a serious condition, but it can be managed. Recent advances in heart failure treatments mean that people with heart failure are living longer and with a greatly improved quality of life.



It is very important you monitor your symptoms every day and to tell your doctor or nurse if your symptoms are getting worse.

Treatments are aimed at:

- Improving your symptoms and maintaining the improvement
- Stabilising your heart failure and preventing it getting worse
- Preventing heart rhythm problems
- Helping you live longer

Some heart failure is preventable with lifestyle changes. Making some healthy lifestyle choices can help you manage your heart failure.

- Take charge of your health
- Get moving. Gradually doing more physical activity will help reduce tiredness in your muscles
- Eat healthily and cut down on salt
- Have a healthy weight
- Cut down on or cut out alcohol
- If you are a smoker, stop. It's never too late to quit

Registered charity number CHY 5507



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Play a better second half.



Don't ignore the signs of heart failure.

Recognise any of the signs? Visit knowyourheart.ie to try our Symptom Checker. The good news is that these symptoms can improve with suitable treatment, enabling you to live well with heart failure.



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What is Heart Failure?

Heart failure means your heart is not working as well as it should. A healthy heart has strong muscular walls which ensure enough blood is pumped around your body. Like any pump it can become weak or stiff over time and not pump as well as it should.

Heart failure is a common and serious condition. There are about 90,000 people living with heart failure in Ireland. Around 10,000 people are newly diagnosed with heart failure each year. This number is expected to increase to at least 12,500 per year by 2030.



Causes of Heart Failure

There are many causes of heart failure but the most common causes are damage to your heart muscle from a **heart attack** or **high blood pressure**. Your doctor will try to find out what has caused your heart failure so that you get the most suitable medicines and other treatments.

If you are concerned that you may be experiencing symptoms of heart failure, visit www.knowyourheart.ie to take the Irish Heart Foundation's online heart failure symptom checker.

Other causes include

- Heart valve problems
- Alcohol related heart muscle damage
- Viral infection of your heart
- Cardiomyopathy, which is a heart muscle disease that is often inherited. But alcohol or drug abuse and some cancer treatments can also cause Cardiomyopathy and heart failure.
- Some abnormal heart rhythms
- Congenital heart defects
- Other diseases such as diabetes; some lung disease; thyroid disease; haemochromatosis (excess build-up of iron); amyloidosis (excess build-up of protein);
- Very rarely it may develop in women during or after pregnancy
- No obvious cause



Know the symptoms

Heart failure can develop over months or years. You may think your symptoms are just part of getting older, but this isn't always true. The main symptoms of heart failure are fluid retention and tiredness.

Important symptoms include

Fluid retention and shortness of breath:



Heart failure causes fluid to build up in your lungs making you feel breathless.

You might notice this when you do something physical like climbing the stairs. An easy way to measure your breathing is while you are lying in bed at night. If you need to add extra pillows because you feel breathless lying flat it could mean you have some fluid building up. In more severe cases you can wake suddenly from sleep, gasping for air.

Fatigue or extreme tiredness:



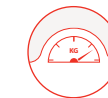
When you retain fluid your heart has to work harder to keep up the supply of blood to all parts of your body. With heart failure your heart can't pump enough blood around your body. Because your muscles are not getting enough blood, you are likely to feel extremely tired.

Swollen ankles:



You may notice your ankles and feet swell during the day. If you press with your thumb along your shin just above your ankle and it leaves an indentation (dimple mark), this is usually a sign of fluid retention.

Sudden weight gain:



A weight gain of 2 kilograms (4 pounds) over 2 days is an early sign your body is retaining fluid. It is important to weigh yourself every morning and keep a record each day.

Other symptoms include:

- Palpitations
- Loss of appetite
- Cough or wheeze that you can't get rid of
- Low energy
- Confusion

If you notice any of these symptoms, or if your symptoms are getting worse, speak to your doctor.