

Overview of heart failure

Heart failure happens when your heart can't pump blood the way it's supposed to.

This can make you feel short of breath, tired, and weak. You may also have swollen feet, ankles, and legs.

Heart failure can affect people of any age.

Preventing heart failure

Heart failure is caused by damage to your heart muscle or valves. Heart disease and high blood pressure are the most common causes of heart failure. You can reduce your risk of these conditions by following a healthy lifestyle and not smoking.

You should also have regular checks with your GP to look at your heart health. Your GP practice will be able to advise you when these should be done.

Diagnosing heart failure

If you're getting symptoms like breathlessness when lying down, swollen ankles, or excessive tiredness you should see your doctor. Your GP will need to examine you to see if you have heart failure. They may also arrange some tests such as an ECG, echocardiogram, and blood tests.

Self-care for heart failure

Read *Staying well with heart failure* from the NZ Heart Foundation

(www.heartfoundation.org.nz/shop/heart-healthcare/heart-failure.pdf).

Follow a heart healthy lifestyle and have regular checks with your GP team. Take any prescribed medications regularly.

Getting help for heart failure

If you're having chest pain or become short of breath suddenly you should seek emergency medical help. If you have heart failure and are becoming more breathless, or you can't get your swelling down, you should see your doctor or heart failure nurse.

There's a lot of support available in the community to help you to keep well with heart failure.

Find out more about these in the rest of the Heart failure section on HealthInfo

(www.healthinfo.org.nz/home.htm).

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