

The Tests You'll Want To Take

Do any of the following ring a bell with you?

- You're breathless during your normal activities or while lying flat.
- Your feet, ankles or abdomen are swollen and you've gained weight without eating more.
- Your shoes feel tight.
- You're tired all the time, even with normal activities.
- You feel full even without eating, or sick to your stomach.
- Your heart beats fast or irregularly at times.



If these sound all too familiar, it may be time to make an appointment with your primary care physician (PCP). According to the American Heart Association, these can be signs of heart failure. Your PCP will examine you and may refer you for testing. Being told you might have heart failure is stressful and scary. Just like in school, it helps to prepare yourself for basic testing so you understand what's going to happen.



✓ **History and physical exam** – this will include a detailed medical history. Make sure you mention everything, including whether you smoke and what kinds of foods you eat. The more honest you are in answering health history questions, the easier it will be for your doctor to understand your risk for heart failure. Bring all your medications to the appointment for your doctor to review.

✓ **Blood tests** – these will give an idea of how well your heart, kidneys and other organs are working. Heart failure affects the whole body, not just the heart.

✓ **Chest x-ray** – this can show whether your heart is enlarged from working too hard to pump blood. A chest x-ray can also show whether heart failure may be affecting your lungs.

✓ **Electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG)** – this is a painless test, during which small electrodes will be placed on your chest; they are connected by wires to the EKG machine. The machine records heart rhythm, rate of beats and how well your heart is working electrically. An EKG might show if you've had a heart attack in the past, if your heart rhythm is abnormal or if your heart muscle is thicker than normal.

✓ **Echocardiogram** – an "echo" is a test that uses sound waves to reveal the heart's structure and motion. A technician will move a device over your chest, which creates images of your heart's structure by bouncing a silent sound wave off the heart. This test is painless.



✓ **Exercise stress test** – this test is also painless, though you may feel that you're exercising hard. During a stress test, you'll be hooked up to a heart monitor which will measure your heart rate and rhythm while you walk on a treadmill. Your breathing and blood pressure will also be measured. The speed of the treadmill will be increased and the treadmill will be tilted up to make you feel like you're climbing a small hill. You should keep going as long as you can but may stop anytime. A technician will be with you through the whole test. Don't wait to call your PCP if you think you're having heart failure symptoms. The sooner you're tested and diagnosed, the sooner you can start treatment. Though heart failure won't go away, your symptoms can improve with medicine, diet and exercise approved by your doctor. With treatment, you can feel better and stay healthier!

