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Triggers of Sudden Heart Failure

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Overview

Triggers are anything that make your heart failure flare up. A flare-up is also called "sudden heart failure" or "acute heart failure." When you have a flare-up, fluid builds up in your lungs, and you have problems breathing. You might need to go to the hospital. By watching for changes in your condition and avoiding triggers, you can prevent heart failure flare-ups.

Pay attention to your symptoms

Symptoms of heart failure start to happen when your heart can't pump enough blood to the rest of your body.

In the early stages of heart failure, you may:

- Feel tired easily.
- Be short of breath when you exert yourself.
- Feel like your heart is pounding or racing (palpitations).
- Feel weak or dizzy.

As heart failure gets worse, fluid starts to build up in your lungs and other parts of your body. This may cause you to:

- Feel short of breath even at rest.
- Have swelling (edema), especially in your legs, ankles, and feet.
- Gain weight. This may happen over just a day or two, or more slowly.
- Cough or wheeze, especially when you lie down.
- Feel bloated or sick to your stomach.

Avoid triggers

If you know what things trigger your heart failure symptoms to get worse, you can try to avoid them. Avoiding triggers can help you feel better and may prevent sudden heart failure.

People have different triggers. But common ones include eating too much salt, missing a dose of medicine,

and exercising too hard.

- Keep the same schedule.
As much as you can, keep your diet, exercise, and medicine schedules the same every day.
- Limit sodium.
Be aware of how much sodium you are consuming. Your doctor can tell you how much sodium is right for you.
- Take medicines as prescribed.
Take your medicines at the same time every day. Not taking medicine is a trigger for some people.
- Avoid some medicines.
Avoid medicines that can make heart failure symptoms worse. Work with your doctor and pharmacist to choose over-the-counter medicines, such as cold medicines and pain relievers, that are safer for you.
- Be active, but be careful.
Exercise is good for your heart. But exercising too much or too hard can stress your heart and make symptoms worse. Check with your doctor before you start or change an exercise program. Do not exercise when you don't feel well. Watch for signs that your heart is being stressed, and know when to stop and rest.

Other things to know

Certain health problems can cause sudden heart failure. These include:

- Lung infections, such as pneumonia.
- Irregular heart rhythms (arrhythmias).
- Conditions that affect your need for oxygen. These may include:
 - Fever.
 - Anemia (not having enough red blood cells).
 - Thyroid problems.
 - Poorly controlled diabetes.

Certain medicines used to treat heart rhythm problems may also increase the risk of heart failure.

Credits

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Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.



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