

Minding Your Emotional Health

Quick Tips

Living with a chronic condition like heart failure can spark strong emotions and affect your overall mood. You may feel scared about the future and worry about how your illness might affect your family or other parts of your life. Some people share that their social circles change after finding out they have heart failure.

It's normal to feel:

- Sad or mad
- Uncertain or overwhelmed
- Anxious about your symptoms and whether you are doing enough to manage your condition (If you are like other people living with heart failure you likely have other health conditions too)
- Like giving up sometimes

These feelings are more likely to happen:

- When you first learn about your heart failure
- If you have an acute episode that leads to a hospital stay; some people share they feel scared that with each setback, they won't be as strong as they were before
- If heart failure affects your ability to do certain things (for example, work, take care of children or take part in life events, travel, eat out with friends, etc)

But if you feel sad or anxious over a period of time, or if these feelings keep you from enjoying life, you need to ask for help. Your mental health is just as important as how you feel physically.

Finding ways to cope: To feel better, you might try:



Exercising



Joining a support group and/or finding someone you feel comfortable talking with



Doing deep breathing exercises or yoga



Seeing a mental health professional



Keeping a journal of things you are grateful for in your life; gratitude has been linked to many health benefits



Choosing health positive behaviors over isolating yourself or turning to alcohol or other things to feel better



Ongoing feelings of sadness or losing interest in activities that usually make you happy can be telltale signs of depression. Be sure to talk about your emotional health, as well as your physical symptoms.



Tell your doctor or nurse if you think you are suffering from anxiety or depression.

What to look out for:

Everyone feels sad and stressed from time to time. But be sure to tell your care team if you feel:

- Frustrated about managing your heart failure
- That heart failure is controlling your life
- It's easier to avoid taking care of your health
- Alone or isolated

Questions you can ask yourself:

- How often do I feel down, depressed or hopeless?
- Do I notice having less interest in doing things I usually enjoy?
- Do I have trouble falling or staying asleep, or do I sleep too much?
- Do I have less of an appetite, or am I overeating and craving comfort foods?
- Do I feel badly about myself, that I'm a burden on others or have let them down?
- Do I have trouble concentrating on tasks?

"It's okay to let yourself feel bad for a little bit. Maybe you need to cry, maybe you need to vent in some other way, and then you pick yourself up and move [forward]."

– *Person living with heart failure*

Be sure to talk about your feelings with your care team. They are there to take care of you, and that includes your emotional wellbeing too. Your care team can work with you to find ways to help you cope with your heart failure.

Anxiety and feeling blue can have direct effects on the heart too. Stress, anxiety and depression can make the heart work harder. Untreated stress has been linked to high blood pressure, damage to the heart's arteries, abnormal heart rhythms and a weaker immune system. People with depression also tend to have poorer outcomes, so it's important to find healthy ways to cope with stress and feelings of sadness.

