

YOUR HEALTH MATTERS: WORKING WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER (HCP) TO HELP MANAGE YOUR HEART FAILURE



In the U.S., there are more than 6 million adults living with heart failure and about 1 million heart failure hospitalizations each year. Having a better understanding of your heart failure is an important part of helping to manage your condition.

Dr. Shaival Kapadia, a distinguished cardiologist affiliated with James River Cardiology in Virginia, sheds light on how you can prepare for your appointments with your health care provider (HCP) and become a better partner in your care journey while living with heart failure. "Understanding how heart failure can impact you and recognizing the associated symptoms are steps you can take to manage your heart failure. Staying in close communication with your HCP and keeping them informed of changes in your symptoms are key to help managing your condition," he notes.



The Three Steps You Can Take to Prepare for Each Appointment

One of the most important actions you can take is to schedule regular appointments with your HCP. During this time, you can share information about your condition, discuss changes in your symptoms, and ask questions.

Before any appointment, be prepared by taking the following three steps:

1 Keep track of changes to your health, such as:



Feeling short of breath, especially at rest



Frequent coughing or wheezing



Weight gain of more than 2-3 pounds in a day or more than 5 pounds in a week



Swelling, especially in your legs, ankles and feet (called edema)



Feeling tired all the time



Loss of appetite and feeling sick to your stomach



Feeling confused or experiencing impaired thinking



Experiencing a faster heart rate

2 Come to your appointments with a list of key questions to ask your HCP

Some examples to get you thinking include:

- What should I be doing regularly to monitor my heart failure?
- What symptoms should I look for and keep track of? What is the best way to do this?
- What are the most important things I could be doing to manage my heart failure?
- What lifestyle changes can I continue to make to my diet, fluid intake and/or exercise routine? Are there other important changes I can make?
- Should I engage in or avoid any particular activities?

3 Enlist a family member or trusted friend to come with you to the appointment

They can help you talk about any changes they may have noticed in your condition or symptoms. They can also take notes to help you remember the details of the discussion after your appointment.



Speak Freely and Frequently with Your HCP

In addition to scheduling routine visits, developing a good relationship and having an open, honest dialogue with your HCP is important. This can lead to more coordinated care, which can help keep your heart failure from getting worse. A close collaboration with your HCP can help them determine a heart failure management plan for you, which could include:

- Making heart-healthy lifestyle changes, such as limiting the amount of salt you eat to reduce fluid build-up
- Limiting or avoiding alcohol and tobacco
- Taking your medicines as prescribed
- Figuring out ways your caregiver can help you with your care plan
- Working with your HCP to manage other conditions that could raise the burden of heart failure, such as obesity and high blood pressure