

My Planned Care Patient Information Platform

Cardiology - Heart failure

Introduction

The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the NHS ability to provide routine elective services. We recognise that patients are waiting longer than we would all like and it is not always possible to identify when treatment will take place. This document provides you with information on how you can support yourself while waiting to attend the hospital.

Heart failure means that the heart is unable to pump blood around the body properly. It usually occurs because the heart has become too weak or stiff. It is sometimes called congestive heart failure. Heart failure does not mean your heart has stopped working. It just needs some support to help it work better. It can occur at any age but is most common in older people. Heart failure is a long-term condition that tends to get gradually worse over time. It cannot usually be cured, but the symptoms can often be controlled enabling you to live a healthy life.

The main symptoms of heart failure are:

- breathlessness after activity or at rest
- feeling tired most of the time and finding exercise exhausting
- swollen ankles and legs
- Some people also experience other symptoms, such as a persistent cough, a fast heart rate and dizziness.
- Symptoms can develop quickly (acute heart failure) or gradually over weeks or months (chronic heart failure).

When to get medical advice

- See a GP if you experience persistent or gradually worsening symptoms of heart failure.
- Call 999 for an ambulance or go to your nearest A&E department as soon as possible if you have sudden or very severe symptoms.
- A number of tests can be used to help check how well your heart is working, including blood tests, an ECG and an echocardiogram.

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Heart failure is often the result of a number of problems affecting the heart at the same time. Conditions that can lead to heart failure include:

- coronary heart disease – where the arteries that supply blood to the heart become clogged up with fatty substances (atherosclerosis), which may cause angina or a heart attack.
- high blood pressure – this can put extra strain on the heart, which over time can lead to heart failure
- cardiomyopathy – conditions affecting the heart muscle
- heart rhythm problems (arrhythmias), such as atrial fibrillation
- damage or other problems with the heart valves
- congenital heart disease – birth defects that affect the normal workings of the heart

Common treatments include:

- lifestyle changes – including eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly and stopping smoking
- medicine – a range of medicines can help; many people need to take 2 or 3 different types
- devices implanted in your chest – these can help control your heart rhythm
- surgery – such as a bypass operation or a heart transplant

Lifelong treatment may be required. A cure may be possible when heart failure has a treatable cause. For example, if your heart valves are damaged, replacing or repairing them may cure the condition.

Health and Wellbeing Guidance for Patients - Useful Website links

Whilst you are waiting for any procedure, it is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle and be as medically fit as possible. If you have any long-standing conditions such as high blood pressure you should get this reviewed at your Doctor's surgery to make sure it remains well controlled. This will also help prevent any unnecessary delays when you come for your pre-operative assessment.

British Heart Foundation provides information and support on a range of **Cardiology** conditions including Heart failure.

General **health and wellbeing information** to support our local residents to stop smoking or with weight management **Healthy Surrey** has been commissioned to provide free stop smoking and weight management support our community.

- **National Stop Smoking and weight management support is also available via**
 - **Quit smoking - Better Health - NHS (www.nhs.uk)** The NHS stop smoking service provides a range of options to help you quit including support from an advisor, stop smoking medications, e-cigarettes and a digital offer for those who wish to quit by themselves. If you are not ready to quit smoking, but would like more information on how to protect your family, **Smoke free Homes**, advises on how to make your home and car smoke free.
 - **Live Well - NHS (www.nhs.uk)** are here to help you and offer different levels of support to maintain a healthy weight and to stop smoking, alcohol support and eating well etc.

- **Healthy eating and being active**
Information and advice on healthy eating and becoming more active is available from:
 - **Eat well - NHS (www.nhs.uk)** (website) - includes easy to prepare meals for healthy meals and the **NHS Food Scanner app - Healthier Families - NHS (www.nhs.uk)** to help reduce levels of sugar in your diet.
 - **Weight Management Service** The service supports adults aged 18 years or over who want to lose weight and have been identified as obese.
 - **Lose weight - Better Health - NHS (www.nhs.uk)** (website) - includes tips on getting active for all, including the downloadable active apps, as well as tailored advice for those living with a long-term conditions.

- **Find out your BMI**
You can get help to lead a healthier lifestyle if you're an adult (18 years or over) living on the Isle of Wight and your body mass index (BMI) is above average. Use this tool to **BMI calculator | Check your BMI - NHS | Please fill in your details (www.nhs.uk)** if it's too high, sign up for a programme that will help you lose weight BMI of 30+
 - **BMI of 28+**
You can get support from the 'Live Well' website, if your BMI is 28 or over if at least one of the following applies:
 - you have Type 1 and 2 Diabetes or Metabolic Syndrome
 - you have problems with your heart, circulation, hypertension or high blood pressure
 - you have been diagnosed with anxiety/depression
 - you need to lose weight before receiving another medical treatment or surgery

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- you have a serious long-term health condition that is adversely affected by your weight such as muscular skeletal disorders (back pain, mobility issues) and asthma
- you're from a black or ethnic minority background.

- **BMI of 25+**

If you have a Body Mass Index of 25 or higher [Eat well - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk) provides online support to help you lose weight and includes access to the NHS 12-week weight loss plan.

The NHS 12-week fitness plan will support your weight loss plan as well as improve your health. This is aimed at beginners and will help get you into the habit of regular exercise over the course of the programme. It is structured but flexible enough to allow you to fit the exercise sessions around your other weekly commitments.

What tests will the GP do?

- If your GP suspects that you have a heart problem they will refer you for some diagnostic tests prior to referring you to the specialist Cardiology service. The tests that they may do include:
 - 12 Lead ECG – copy should be sent with the referral .
 - 24 Hour Holter Monitor or other such rhythm recording – copy should be sent with the referral
 - Blood tests
 - Echocardiogram
- It is important that your GP sends in ALL diagnostic test results that have been performed in primary care or other centres. This will ensure that your referral is managed appropriately and in a timely manner.

What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

If you are experiencing any worsening signs or symptoms of any Cardiological problems, you should first consult your General Practitioner (GP).

Patients requiring Cardiac Surgery or other specialised Cardiology intervention will be referred to one of our network centres in London; St George's Hospital, Tooting, Royal Brompton Hospital or St Bartholomew's. Consultant Surgeon's from London hospitals visit Royal Surrey Hospital on a monthly basis to discuss patients requiring surgery and to provide an outreach outpatient service.

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a. Urgent Health Advice

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. You can also visit www.nhs.uk. The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

b. Life Threatening Emergencies

For something life threatening – severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains – please dial 999.

Contact Us:

Call: Surrey & Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust  01737 231958	Email: sash.pals@nhs.net For My Planned Care enquiries	Website: https://www.surreyandsussex.nhs.uk/
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