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Classes of Heart Failure

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1 Understand HF

Class I-IV
How severe are the patient's symptoms?

- Fatigued or okay with activity?
- No chest pain or palpitation?
- Unusual shortness of breath?
- Comfortable at rest?

Class A-D
What level of problems does the healthcare provider see?

Doctors usually classify patients' heart failure according to the severity of their symptoms. The table below describes the most commonly used classification system, the New York Heart Association (NYHA) Functional Classification¹. It places patients in one of four categories based on how much they are limited during physical activity.

| Class | Patient Symptoms |
|-------|---|
| I | No limitation of physical activity. Ordinary physical activity does not cause undue fatigue, palpitation, dyspnea (shortness of breath). |
| II | Slight limitation of physical activity. Comfortable at rest. Ordinary physical activity results in fatigue, palpitation, dyspnea (shortness of breath). |
| III | Marked limitation of physical activity. Comfortable at rest. Less than ordinary activity causes fatigue, palpitation, or dyspnea. |
| IV | Unable to carry on any physical activity without discomfort. Symptoms of heart failure at rest. If any physical activity is undertaken, discomfort increases. |

| Class | Objective Assessment |
|-------|---|
| A | No objective evidence of cardiovascular disease. No symptoms and no limitation in ordinary physical activity. |
| B | Objective evidence of minimal cardiovascular disease. Mild symptoms and slight limitation during ordinary activity. Comfortable at rest. |
| C | Objective evidence of moderately severe cardiovascular disease. Marked limitation in activity due to symptoms, even during less-than-ordinary activity. Comfortable only at rest. |
| D | Objective evidence of severe cardiovascular disease. Severe limitations. Experiences symptoms even while at rest. |

For Example:

- A patient with minimal or no symptoms but a large pressure gradient across the aortic valve or severe obstruction of the left main coronary artery is classified:
 - **Function Capacity I, Objective Assessment D**
- A patient with severe anginal syndrome but angiographically normal coronary arteries is classified:
 - **Functional Capacity IV, Objective Assessment A**

Heart Failure

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Heart Failure

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Heart Failure Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Heart Failure: Partnering in Your Treatment

10 Understand Your HF

- 1. How serious is my heart failure?
- 2. What are my symptoms?
- 3. How often should I take my medicine?
- 4. How often should I see my doctor?

11 Identify Your HF Needs

- 5. Am I a candidate for HF medicines?
- 6. Are there any medicines I should avoid?
- 7. How often should I see my doctor?

12 You have any problems that you all think are on the heart and lungs, are there any?

13 What treatment options should I explore? How often should I see my doctor?

Use these questions to ask your doctor about heart failure.

¹ Adapted from Dolgin M, Association NYH, Fox AC, Gorlin R, Levin RI, New York Heart Association. Criteria Committee. Nomenclature and criteria for diagnosis of diseases of the heart and great vessels. 9th ed. Boston, MA: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins; March 1, 1994. Original source: Criteria Committee, New York Heart Association, Inc. Diseases of the Heart and Blood Vessels. Nomenclature and Criteria for diagnosis, 6th edition Boston, Little, Brown and Co. 1964, p 114.

This content was last reviewed April 2015.

HF Series in Heart Insight Magazine

Big Heart Problem
In the first of a four-part series on heart failure, we investigate what it is, what causes it and what's the prognosis.

The Unrelaxing Heart
The second installment explains heart failure with muscle intact. Queen Latifah and her mom, Rita, share their personal experience with Rita's own heart failure diagnosis.

The Ins and Outs of Hospitalization
Heart failure patients are often hospitalized. This article looks at managing self-care to minimize just how often re-hospitalizations happen.

Shared Decision Making for Advanced HF
When HF progresses to an advanced stage, there are many decisions to be made. Here we delve into the importance of shared decision making.



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HF Info Sheets

What is Heart Failure? | Spanish
How Can I Live with Heart Failure? | Spanish
Ejection Fraction Explained | Spanish
Questions To Ask Your Doctor
What is Echocardiography?
What is a Stress Test?

HF Lifestyle Sheets

Why Should I Limit Sodium?
How Do I Follow a Healthy Diet? | Spanish
How Can Physical Activity Become a Way of Life? | Spanish
How Can I Make My Lifestyle Healthier?
How Can I Support My Loved One?

Trackers

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Medication Tracker | Spanish
Activity Tracker
Blood Pressure Tracker

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