

Heart failure can be manageable

It's a serious diagnosis, providers say. But there's a roadmap to keep enjoying life

If you see your cardiologist and they throw out the term "heart failure," your heart might figuratively skip a beat. The heart is a vital organ, and if it's failing, should I be counting my days?

While *advanced* heart failure will mean big life changes, [Margy Goetten](#), APRN, a cardiology provider at OSF HealthCare, wants you to know that you *can* live with heart failure.

What to know about heart failure

Goetten says heart failure occurs when the organ can't pump blood or relax like normal.

"New heart failure patients may experience shortness of breath. They might have difficulty when laying down. They can't breathe. Leg swelling and fatigue are also common," Goetten explains. "But if heart failure is well controlled, a lot of people don't have symptoms."

Milder cases of heart failure can be controlled by taking multiple medications – a cocktail of sorts that research has shown to help. Titrate medication, for example, helps with shortness of breath, Goetten says. Managing other health problems and not missing doctor's appointments are also must-dos.

"It's really symptom management," Goetten says.

People with *advanced* heart failure, called end-stage, are "pretty sick," Goetten says. She says they often require frequent trips to the hospital.

"Your symptoms are more severe. They come more frequently," Goetten points out. "If you miss medications, the symptoms can occur quickly within a day rather than missing medications for a couple days and showing symptoms," Goetten says.

In addition to medication, end-stage heart failure patients might have a device – an Impella or a balloon pump – put in their heart to help it pump normally. Goetten often sees these people live a "new normal." For example, they might cut back on long vacation trips in favor of "staycations" where they know their heart care team is just minutes away.

Prevention

Just as the tires on our car wear down with miles driven, our heart wears down with age. It's inevitable. But healthy habits can help your heart hold up longer. Get on a diet and exercise plan to avoid obesity. Manage conditions such as diabetes, sleep apnea, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

"Once those are under control, a lot of the symptoms seem to get better," Goetten says.

Learn more

Read more about keeping your heart in top shape on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).