

# Understanding Heart Failure

WATCH THE VIDEO ONLINE!

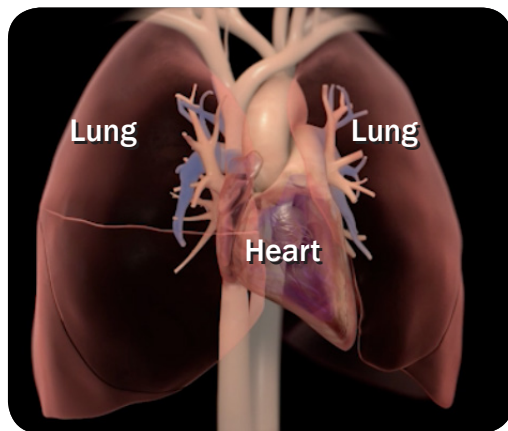
[www.healthjourneysupport.com/cardiology/heart-failure](http://www.healthjourneysupport.com/cardiology/heart-failure)

This handout can help you understand what heart failure is and how it affects your heart and body.

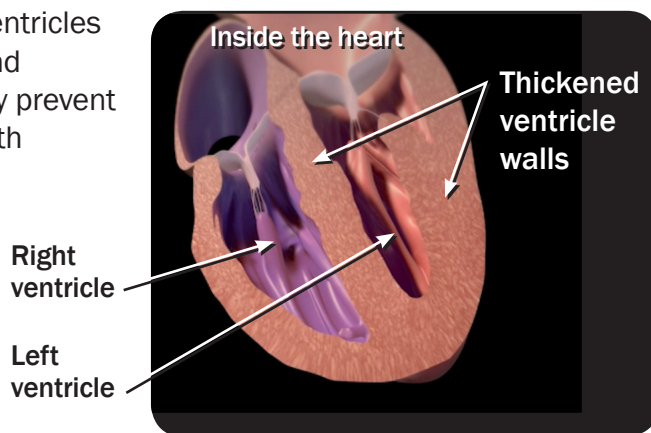
## What is Heart Failure?

If you have heart failure, your heart can't pump enough blood to meet your body's needs.

This is because the pumping sections of your heart, called **ventricles**, may be weak or damaged.



The walls of your ventricles may also be stiff and thickened. This may prevent them from filling with enough blood.

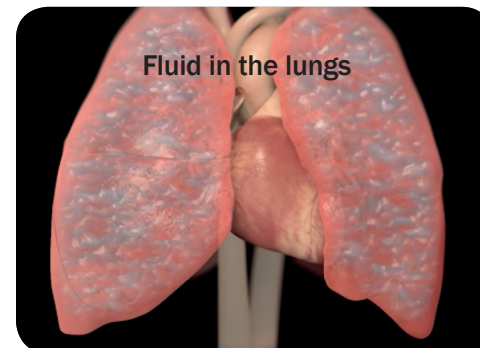


## Left-sided Heart Failure

This type of heart failure means your left ventricle does not deliver enough oxygen-rich blood to your body.

When this happens, you feel tired and out of breath.

Blood pressure also goes up in the blood vessels between your lungs and left ventricle.



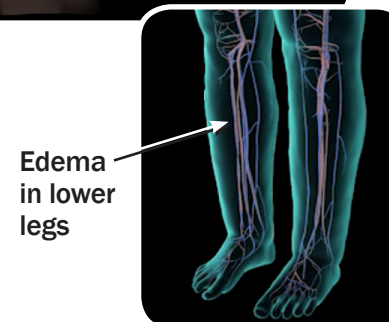
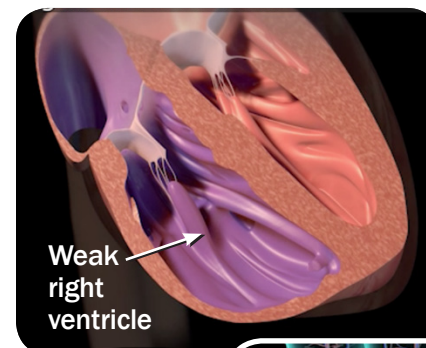
The higher pressure forces fluid out of your blood and into your lungs. Fluid in your lungs makes it harder for you to breathe.

## Right-sided Heart Failure

Right-sided heart failure means your right ventricle is too weak to pump enough blood to your lungs.

The result is a buildup of blood in your veins.

Blood buildup in your veins forces fluid into your body tissues. This is called edema.



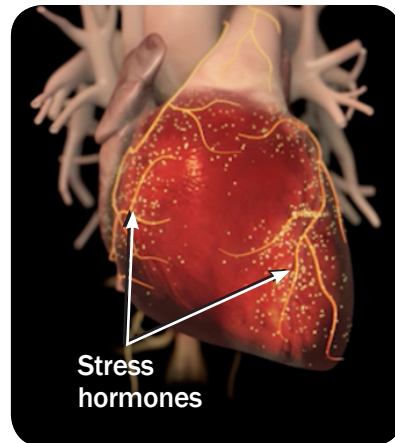
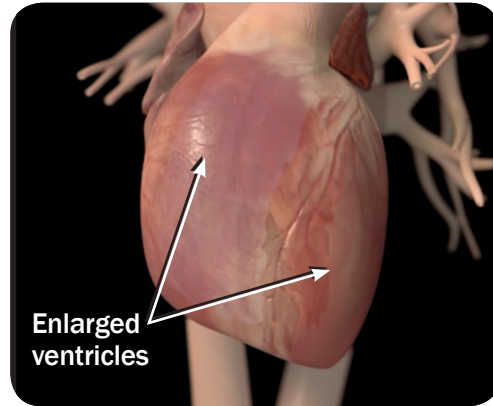
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## Long-term Effects of Heart Failure

Over time, heart failure on either side of your heart results in weakened, enlarged ventricles. The weakened ventricles deliver less blood to your body.

To make up for this, your nervous system releases substances called stress hormones. Stress hormones make your heart beat faster.

Unfortunately, the stress hormones can also damage your ventricles and make your heart failure worse.

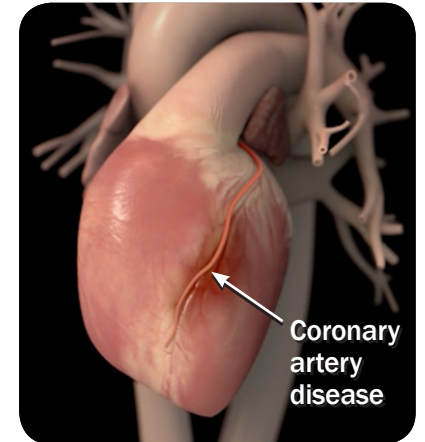


## Causes of Heart Failure

The most common cause of heart failure is coronary artery disease.

Other causes include:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Heart valve problems
- Heart muscle damage
- Irregular heartbeats (arrhythmias)
- Heart defects
- Poisons or substance abuse
- Lung disease
- Sleep apnea



The information in this handout has been created and peer reviewed by graduate-level medical illustrators, followed by reviews from medical subject experts, either physicians or PhDs on the Nucleus Medical Review Board, to ensure medical accuracy and audience level appropriateness.

The handout is intended to supplement the information you receive from your health care provider and should never be considered personal medical advice. Always contact your health care provider with health questions and concerns.