

3.21 Cardiovascular health - Heart failure

Marlon, aged 75, is getting breathless when he walks. It's been going on for a few months. He has had heart attacks in the past but no angina pain. His ECG hasn't changed but his NTpro-BNP is 2000 (normal range less than 200) and he has ankle swelling and bi-basal crepitations. He has been feeling really tired. You are arranging an echocardiogram through cardiology.

Marlon: I'm pretty sure that my old heart is to blame for this breathing problem doc...

Provide: Yes. Your heart isn't working at 100% efficiency anymore. You have a problem called heart failure. The blood isn't pumped around the body as well as before. This can cause a tendency for fluid to collect in your ankles, and in your lungs. This is why your ankles are swollen and you feel breathless. This also explains your tiredness.

Elicit: Alright?

Provide: I'd like you to weight yourself, naked, each morning, and to let me know if you gain 2 kg (4 pounds) or more over a day or two or if you are getting more breathless, particularly if the breathlessness is waking you at night.

Elicit: Have you got that?

What more would you like to know at this stage?

Provide: There are a number of tablets which we can use, to help with your symptoms, and to keep your heart in decent nick. There are also some things that you can do to help yourself too. Exercise is good for your heart, but build it up slowly. Like any other muscle it will grow stronger with exercise. Avoid adding salt to your food, or use LoSalt instead. We can advise you about a healthy diet if you like.

Elicit: Would you be interested in learning more about heart failure? What about reading the [patient.info](#) page about heart failure? My heart failure nurse will also help you to understand how to look after your heart.

Marlon: I don't have a computer.

Perhaps your daughter might help?

Provide: Since you don't have access to a computer shall I print one off today?