



PREPARING FOR YOUR CONSULTATION

A guide to help you get the most from your conversations with your doctor or nurse.



ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is designed to help you get the most from your appointments with your doctor or nurse, whether it's online or in person. It provides advice and tips on what you can do to play a more active role in conversations and share the right information to ensure you receive the best possible care. It also includes an overview of the medical team who will be responsible for your heart failure care, and where you can find more information about the support available to you.



YOUR MEDICAL TEAM



Living with heart failure can be stressful and worrying but knowing your medical team and understanding your condition and symptoms can help you to be fully involved in all decisions about your treatment and care. You may see many different healthcare professionals about your health so it's important to understand their roles and have a good relationship with them over the long term.

Your main medical team may include:

- a **cardiologist** (registrar/consultant), who is a doctor specialising in treating heart problems. Your cardiologist is responsible for overseeing your initial diagnosis as well as your ongoing tests, treatment and care;
- **heart failure nurse specialists** and **general nurses**, who perform medical tests, provide self-management advice, information and counselling. Sometimes they may also prescribe your medications; and
- your **GP (General Practitioner)**, who provides your routine healthcare, including physical exams and basic tests.

Other healthcare professionals who may be involved in your care are:

- **physiotherapists**, who can help you develop a plan for regular physical activities;
- **dietitians**, who teach heart-healthy eating guidelines and help develop meal plans;
- **mental health professionals**, who can help you deal with emotional stress, anxiety or depression; and
- **pharmacists**, who can give you information about your medicines. Some pharmacists can also prescribe medicines.

If you have any questions about your treatment you can also speak to your pharmacist. Not everybody will have access to all these healthcare professionals, so if it's not clear, ask your cardiologist, heart failure nurse or GP to tell you who will be part of your care team.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING YOUR APPOINTMENTS



Your doctor or nurse will probably start by asking you a number of questions about your symptoms, including how regular or severe they are. If you have scheduled a face to face appointment, then they may also carry out a physical examination. This may include tests such as X-rays, scans or blood tests.

When assessing how severe your heart failure is, they may refer to the New York Heart Association (NYHA) classification. If you would like to understand more about the severity of your heart failure, ask your doctor or nurse about your classification and what it means.

Sometimes, when you arrive or log on for an appointment, you may find that your usual doctor or nurse is not available, and you see someone else. This is quite usual, and you can treat it just like your normal appointment.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR APPOINTMENTS

Your appointment is your chance to openly discuss the impact of heart failure on your life, as well as work closely with your doctor or nurse to discuss and agree next steps.

There are three stages to think about:

1

**BEFORE
YOUR
APPOINTMENT**

2

**DURING
YOUR
APPOINTMENT**

3

**AFTER
YOUR
APPOINTMENT**

Thinking about what you want to get out of your appointments before you go helps to ensure you have the opportunity to discuss everything you need to in the time available during your appointment.



1 BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT



Involving your family, friends or carer

- Have your family, friends or carer noticed anything different in your health or well-being in recent weeks or months?
- Have you asked someone to come with you to your appointment? Would you find it helpful to have someone with you at your appointments?
 - Often a prompt or reminder from them during your appointment can help you to remember specific details about your health.
 - Have you practised what you would like to say at your next appointment with a member of your family, friend or carer?
 - Practising the discussions can help you feel more at ease and comfortable during the actual appointment.



Track your symptoms

- How have you have been feeling since your last appointment?
 - **Physically:** are there any changes in your heart failure symptoms (such as breathlessness, tiredness or ankle swelling)? Try to be specific, for example, when did they start and what makes them better or worse?
 - **Emotionally:** how are you feeling emotionally, and have you been feeling any differently? Have you been feeling depressed, anxious or worried?
- How do your symptoms affect your day-to-day life?
- If you have recorded your symptoms in a diary, what information from this do you want to discuss? For example, any significant changes or a gradual change that you are particularly concerned about



Your treatment history

(i.e. medications and medical tests)

- As you may see more than one doctor or nurse, it is helpful to make sure they are all aware of which treatments you take and medical tests you have had.
- Write a list of all of your medications, including prescription and non- prescription ('over-the-counter') medicines, and take it with you to your appointment.
- If you have kept copies of previous test results and echocardiograms, take them with you to refer to during your appointment.



Preparing your questions

To get the most out of your appointment, it is important that you have the opportunity to ask your own questions and raise any concerns. This should help you understand more about how you can manage your condition.

- You might want to consider asking about:
 - Recent or upcoming medical tests or results (for example, what do the results mean?)
 - Medication (for example, is my current medication still right for me?)
 - Further support, advice and information on managing your heart failure (for example, are there any lifestyle adjustments I should be making?)



Reflecting on your last appointment

- If you made notes from your last appointment, it might be useful to refer back to them:
 - Are there any key points that you wish to discuss further?



Preparing for a digital consultations

Before any appointments, it's important you're prepared so you can make the most of the time you've been allotted.

- Make sure you have any notes or instructions from previous appointments.
- Ensure your device is set up properly and is connected to your Wi-Fi. If this isn't possible, you should ask for an appointment over the phone instead.
- You could bring somebody along with you to help take notes or voice any questions you'd like to ask your doctor.
- Bring something along to make notes with - these will come in handy for any future appointments you have with your doctor or heart failure team.

Having gone through the questions and written notes, you should feel more prepared and confident about your appointment. Refer to the symptom tracker (this can be found at www.fightingfailure.co.uk) and start the conversation with how you are feeling, both physically and emotionally.



Remember to:

- **Be honest** - be open about how you are feeling and any noticeable changes in your symptoms or overall well-being. Try to be specific and give examples of how they are affecting you. Without giving all the relevant information, your doctor or nurse cannot provide the best advice and care.
- **Take your time** - try not to feel rushed, and stay relaxed so you remember the key points you wanted to discuss. Referring to your notes and symptom tracker should help with this.
- **Be forthcoming** - do not wait to be asked about a symptom or concern. Tell your doctor or nurse what is on your mind. Give as much information as you can by referring to your list if you have prepared one.
- **Write things down** - particularly if you do not have time to discuss everything you wanted to raise. If you have someone with you, ask them to write notes for you.
- **Agree** - your next appointment date, together with an action plan.
- **Ask questions** - do not be afraid to ask questions if there is anything you do not understand. It is important to be completely clear about your treatment and care.

Symptoms: Ask your doctor or nurse about any signs or symptoms you need to look out for during your day-to-day activities. Be clear on what you need to do if you notice new symptoms or if your existing symptoms worsen. Ask how you should report any significant changes between appointments and who to contact if you have any concerns out of hours.

New prescriptions: If you are given a new prescription, ask about why you have been given it, what the potential side effects are, and how it could affect your daily life. Note down what you should do if you experience any side effects, including who you should inform, namely your doctor or nurse, or another member of the medical team.

Keeping a record: Make sure that you obtain a copy of all documents used or drafted during your discussion, such as referral letters and test results, as you may need to refer back to them later.

Support: You may want to ask if there are other sources of further information and local support available to you.

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AFTER YOUR APPOINTMENT

Hopefully, you will have left your last appointment with a plan of how you want to manage your condition, knowing what symptoms to monitor and when to contact your doctor or nurse with any changes to your condition.

Here are some suggestions to help you reflect and remember the key points you discussed and agreed:



Reflecting on your appointment

- If you took notes during your appointment, it's worth re-reading them now to check if there is anything missing and/or if they make sense. Or watch the recorded appointment back.
- Did you get answers to all of your questions?



Updating your family, friends or carer

You might find it useful to tell your friends, family or carer about the outcomes of your appointment. This will ensure that they are fully informed about your care and are able to support you with your agreed next steps. If they were in the appointment with you, it may be helpful to reflect on your appointment together.

- Have you shared what was discussed at your appointment with your family, friends or carer?
 - If they attended with you, do they agree with your thoughts and understanding of what was discussed? Is there anything you may have missed?
 - Tell them about any symptoms or changes you have been advised to look out for, and ask them if they can keep an eye on these too.



Remembering points for your next appointment

While it's fresh in your mind, it might help to think about what went well and what you would like to be different at future appointments. You may find it helpful to write these thoughts down now so you can refer back to them before your next appointment.

If you get side-effects with any medication you are taking, talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. This includes any possible side effects not listed in the information leaflet that comes in the pack. You can report side effects via the Yellow Card Scheme at www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard. By reporting side effects, you can help provide more information on the safety of your medication.



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