

The Inova Heart Link Tel-Assurance® Program

Heart Failure Frequently Asked Questions

What is heart failure?

Heart failure means that your heart muscle is weakened and is not pumping blood properly. The heart either cannot fill with enough blood or pump with enough force or both. It is not the same as a heart attack.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Signs and symptoms of heart failure are very different from person to person. In general, many people experience swelling or bloating, sometimes in the abdomen, legs or feet. Some people have trouble with breathing, especially when lying down. Some people may have a decreased ability to do everyday things, such as climbing stairs or taking a shower, and feel tired all the time, even if they have not gained weight. The signs and symptoms you feel are unique to you. Your heart is a muscle and the symptoms that you feel depend on where your heart muscle is weakened.

How many Americans experience heart failure?

You are not alone. In the United States there are 5 million people living with heart failure. The American Heart Association reports that there are approximately 400,000-700,000 new cases of heart failure reported annually.

What does having heart failure mean to me?

When you are diagnosed with heart failure, you will need to make lifestyle changes to improve your quality of life. The most important change is taking an active role in understanding what your body is telling you. You should follow your physician's orders, which may include taking prescription medications regularly, following a low sodium diet, weighing yourself every morning, and understanding the consequences of weight gain.

How will my diet change?

You will be asked to follow a diet of less than 2 grams of sodium per day, which is less than 1 teaspoon of salt over 24 hours. You also may be instructed to watch your fluid intake.

How will I know how to do this?

By participating in the Inova HeartLink Tel-Assurance Program, you have special access to an Inova Heart and Vascular Institute nurse who will review your status daily. The nurse helps you understand the changes your physician has ordered and will serve as a guide to help you care for yourself effectively.

Why should I participate in the Inova HeartLink Tel-Assurance Program?

The HeartLink Tel-Assurance program improves the quality of life for heart failure patients. The program provides you daily access to a specially trained cardiac nurse who will monitor your symptoms and coach you through any changes – all from the comfort of your home. The information you provide helps your physician monitor your heart failure, adjust your medications, and support your lifestyle changes. This program reduces the risks associated with not following your doctor's guidelines including, further damage to your heart or further decrease in your ability to do the things you enjoy.

Why do I have to check in every day? Can't I check in a couple times a week?

Checking in every day reinforces the importance of monitoring your sodium and fluid consumption daily. Also, the information you provide helps your healthcare team know if you are beginning to develop any problems, perhaps even before you realize it.

I haven't been in the hospital in a long time. Why should I start this program?

The fact that you have not been in the hospital for a long time is a good sign, and demonstrates your commitment to your health. However, preventing hospitalizations is only one thing that we can do to promote optimal health. By understanding what triggers your symptoms, we can work with you to minimize symptoms and maintain your heart's health. We can also better understand how your body responds or does not respond to treatment. The information you provide helps us to ensure that your treatment is as effective as possible.

Additional questions?

If you have any questions about the HeartLink service or enrollment process, please call our Inova HeartLink Tel-Assurance question line at 887-842-6239.

Enrolled patients may contact their care manager with questions:

Inova Alexandria Hospital: 703-504-7881

Inova Fairfax Hospital: 703-776-4444

Inova Mount Vernon Hospital: 703-664-7492