

Living With Heart Failure 1

Tom

You should recognise what this is.

Sound effects in background

- Pump

Tom

It's a Pump. This one dates back to about 1935. Same as the car. I hope it worked a lot better then than it does now!

Sound effects in background

- Pump

Tom

The fact is, we tend to take things like Pumps for granted unless they stop working, that is. And the same is true of the Pump in our body – the human heart. It Pumps blood around our bodies for an entire lifetime. Now, we all know we can't live without a heart, yet we seldom give it a moment's thought until something goes wrong, that is. Then we have to think about it very seriously indeed.

Sound effects in background

- Movement/Walking

Tom

When the heart stops Pumping efficiently, it's known rather alarmingly as heart failure. Heart failure is a chronic condition. It cannot be cured. However, things can

be done to help it. So, join me, as I go, eventually, and talk to some people who know how. Hopefully sometime today.

Sound effects in background

- Movement/Walking

Janet

Hello Tom

Tom

Hi.

Janet

Car trouble?

Tom

Not quite car trouble, but I want you to tell me about heart failure. Janet Reid – she's a nurse who specialises in heart failure. Tell me, Janet, firstly, what causes this thing called heart failure?

Janet

Well, Tom, the thing is, heart failure isn't a disease in itself. It's actually due to some other underlying problem, the main reason being coronary heart disease, which can be a previous heart attack, long standing high blood pressure, or even a leaky or narrow heart valve. There is also a specific heart muscle disease known as cardiomyopathy that can cause it, but what's important to remember with heart failure is that the patient's symptoms can vary in their severity.

Tom

I see. So obviously it affects people in many different ways?

Janet

That's right, Tom, it does. And the signs and symptoms are shortness of breath, either at rest or on exertion, or ankle swelling which is due to fluid retention. But we'd probably be better speaking to Harry, because he's been living with heart failure for a number of years now.

Tom

That's fine by me, but can we use your car? [Laughs]

Janet

You're in.

Sound effects in background

- Entering car and driving off, then parking.

Janet

Tom, this is Harry.

Tom

Pleased to meet you.

Harry

Good to meet you.

Janet

Harry's lucky because he has a heart failure nurse come to visit him. He's on the appropriate medications and your symptoms are well controlled.

Tom

So Harry, tell me, what steps have you taken to control your symptoms?

Harry

Well, I'll tell you what. Exercise is very important, so why don't we take a wee walk and we can have a chat about it?

Tom

Fair enough. Lead the way.

Sound effects in background

- Walking

Harry

Well, the first thing I do in the morning is weigh myself and take a note of it.

Tom

Aye.

Harry

Now, if I put on 2 lb, say two days running, or 3 or 4 lb in a week, well, I would tell the doctor or the nurse. I take all my tablets in the morning, especially the diuretics, because they make you go to the loo quite a lot. You're better, you know, you're better to get that out of the way.

Tom

Aye.

Harry

And then I've got to watch how much salt I eat because salt, you see, attracts water to the tissues and that's – you want to avoid that. Giving up salt isn't really hard, I mean, you just have to avoid foods like cheese and bacon, and of course, heavily salted snacks like crisps and so on, and then of course, it's always better to keep salt off the table at meal times. And I watch how much alcohol I drink – well, no more than two units a day and of course, I've given up the fags completely. And then I take as much exercise as I can. Now, a lot of people think it's a wee bit risky to take exercise when you've got heart failure, but you've got to remember, the heart's a muscle.

Tom

Uh huh.

Harry

You know, and like any other muscle, it gets stronger with exercise. I mean, it can be any sort of exercise – armchair exercise or short strolls or something like that, you know, it doesn't really matter. Every little helps.

Tom

I'll race you to the car then! I could do with a cup of tea.

Janet, you said earlier that heart failure isn't an actual disease but rather caused by other underlying problems. So how does this influence the way you go about treating it?



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Janet

Well there are treatments available for heart failure for people, but it's important that you get the appropriate investigations to find the underlying cause of it.