

HEART HEALTH

Potentially Fatal, Heart Failure Is Both Treatable And with Care, Preventable

By JACKIE GOLDSCHNEIDER
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As Americans live longer, there's been a rise in the nationwide incidence of heart failure, a serious and potentially fatal condition where the heart's ability to fill with, or eject, blood is impaired. Heart failure affects nearly six million adults in the United States, and while there are many risk factors for the condition, including advanced age, it's both treatable and, with proper self-care, largely preventable.

"There are two types of heart failure, and the treatment will depend on the type," said Dr. Samuel Suede, chief of Cardiology at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center in Englewood. "There's systolic heart failure, where the heart muscle is weak and doesn't pump well, and there's diastolic heart failure, where the heart muscle pumps normally but the heart is unable to fill with blood," he said. Since heart failure means proper amounts of oxygen and blood don't reach the body's organs, those organs may begin to fail.

"Certain preexisting conditions will increase your risk of heart failure," explained Dr. Suede, "such as coronary disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking or a history of abnormal heartbeat." Men and women are equally vulnerable to heart failure, he noted.

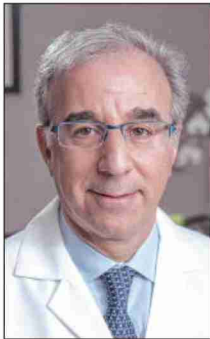
There are several common symptoms of heart failure, which may occur together or individually. "Fatigue and shortness of breath with any activity are common with heart failure," Dr. Suede said, adding that when the heart doesn't properly pump

blood forward or accept blood in, fluid backs up and causes swelling. "Due to the fluid accumulation, patients may find it difficult to sleep because of a cough or shortness of breath and often will use several pillows to prop their head and make them feel more comfortable," he said. Additional symptoms are weight gain and swelling in the legs.

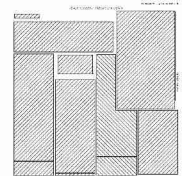
Dr. Kariann Abbate, a heart failure cardiologist at Ridgewood's The Valley Hospital and Valley Medical Group, said many treatments are available for heart failure patients. "For both types of heart failure, we use diuretics to help patients get rid of excess fluid, which relieves their shortness of breath," Abbate said. Several classes of medicine also treat systolic heart failure, including Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme (ACE) Inhibitors, Angiotensin-Receptor Blockers [ARB's], and Beta Blockers, all of which prevent recurrence of heart failure by regulating patient's malfunctioning neurohormonal systems. "Within the newest class of medicine, ARNI's [Angiotensin-Receptor Nephilysin Inhibitors], there's a new medication called Entresto, that's seeing a lot of success," she said, explaining Entresto upregulates the good neurohormones that help patient's hearts to heal.

Technological treatments are also available for certain patients. "In some patients, their heart is dyssynchronous, which means the right and left sides of the heart don't contract in synchrony. So, a biventricular pacemaker can synchronize the function of the ventricles," Dr. Abbate said. A prophylactic defibrillator may also be implanted to prevent sudden death from a cardiac event.

Dr. Abbate explained that a major component of improving heart failure symptoms and facilitating healing involves lifestyle modifications. "Eating a healthy, plant-based diet and regular exercise are important to preventing heart failure," she said, adding that patients need to be judicious about their sodium intake. "When we take in salt we tend



Dr. Samuel Suede



to retain fluid, so to avoid swelling, anyone who's had heart failure shouldn't consume more than two milligrams of sodium per day," she advised. Abbate further recommends those patients avoid alcohol, which can be cardiotoxic.

Also key to preventing heart failure is treating the underlying conditions that increase risk. "If you have diabetes, hypertension or another chronic disease, it's important to see your physician and manage them as well as possible," Abbate said.

Dr. Stephen Angeli, a cardiologist at Teaneck's Holy Name Medical Center, said patients can live a healthy life after heart failure, and that a transitional care program at the hospital helps keep many heart failure patients from being readmitted. A similar transitional program is offered at The Valley Hospital, and at Englewood Hospital, their cardiac rehabilitation center coaches patients back to health with one-on-one care following discharge.

"When a person is admitted to Holy

Name with heart failure, we first treat the acute episode, of course," Dr. Angeli said. "But we've also implemented a transitional program for our high-risk patients, where we follow them after they leave to stay on top of their care." Advanced Practice Nurse Jackeline Thomas works alongside Dr. Angeli to assure those patients take steps to avoid readmission and stay healthy following discharge.

"Most heart failure patients don't know what the condition means, what the medications are for, or when to call the doctor, so we educate them about all of that before they leave the hospital," Thomas said, "and once those patients go home, I call them every two to three days for a month to check in and see if they've had any symptoms." Thomas explained that many patients wait until they can't breathe before they come to the hospital, so by catching a recurrence early, she can get them to their cardiologist and prevent them from being readmitted. "I also make sure they have follow-up appointments with their doctors, and I work with their families and the people who prepare their meals so everyone is on the same page," she said.

"It's a lot for those patients to absorb in a short period of time," said Dr. Angeli, adding Holy Name Medical Center hopes to expand the program to help more of their patients in the future. "By staying on top of your care and making those lifestyle changes, you can really have a better quality of life after heart failure."

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DR. SAMUEL SUEDE, ENGLEWOOD HOSPITAL



Dr. Stephen Angeli



Dr. Kariann Abbate, a cardiologist at The Valley Hospital, checks the heart health of an older patient. The rising incidence of heart failure in the US is partly due to the population aging.