

1. Greene J, Hibbard JH. Why does patient activation matter? An examination of the relationships between patient activation and health-related outcomes. *J Gen Intern Med.* 2012;27(5):520-6. doi:10.1007/s11606-011-1931-2

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An Introduction to  
HEART FAILURE  
CLINICS





## WHAT IS A HEART FAILURE CLINIC?

Heart failure clinics are specifically focused on the care of heart failure patients. Often part of larger hospitals or academic medical centers, heart failure clinics offer advanced technologies and treatments that other clinics may not. The availability of advanced options may make a positive impact in the treatment of your heart failure.

Heart failure is a serious disease that worsens over time. With proper treatment, many patients live active and full lives.

### WHAT CAN I EXPECT AS A NEW PATIENT OF A HEART FAILURE CLINIC?

**Make sure your records arrive before you do.** After scheduling your first appointment at a heart failure clinic, call your current doctor right away to ask them to send your records. This is important because it gives the specialists time to review your history in depth before you arrive, making the most of your visit.

**The first appointment will be about an hour.** During your visit, your medical history will be reviewed with you. Your treatment plan, developed specifically for you, will be discussed with you in detail. The plan will focus on managing your heart failure and symptoms. It may include additional testing, adjustments to your medications and evaluation for advanced options.

**It is important to bring a family member with you.** Patients come to a heart failure clinic in various stages of health and awareness of their disease. Because of this, the experience is unique to each patient. Most patients feel overwhelmed by all of the information they receive in the first visit. Having family support can be very helpful.

**Your care team will want to hear your story.** You and your family will be asked about your current medications, how well you are managing your heart failure, recent hospitalizations and your opinion of how your symptoms are progressing.

**Your current doctor(s) will be consulted.** Your care team at the heart failure clinic is interested in the opinion of your current doctor(s) regarding the progression of your heart failure symptoms and your recent medical history.

**A more rapid assessment may be required for very ill patients.** Patients with severe heart failure symptoms may require immediate hospitalization and an inpatient evaluation. These patients are evaluated and managed with focused attention at an expedited pace.

### WHO DECIDES THE TREATMENT PLAN FOR MY HEART FAILURE?

**You, your loved ones and your doctors will make decisions together.** This collaboration is called “shared decision-making.” Patients who take an active role in their care decisions are likely to have better outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

**The availability of advanced options may make a positive impact in the treatment of your heart failure.**

### HERE’S HOW:

**Ask questions.** All questions are good questions. You may bring up an important point or steer the conversation in a way that could result in a better understanding for your care team and your caregiver.

**Speak freely.** Your care team functions best when they have a clear understanding of how you feel. You are the expert on this, so be honest and thorough when explaining your symptoms. Even if you’re experiencing something like a toothache that you think is unrelated to your heart failure, tell your care team.

**Take notes.** A notebook is a great tool to keep track of things you want to remember from your appointments and for questions you may have in between. Having this all in one place can be a useful reference and help to make the most of your time with your care team.

### WHERE CAN I GO FOR SUPPORT?

**A heart failure clinic.** The relationships you build with your care team, and those with fellow patients and caregivers you meet at the clinic, can come to feel like a special community. You all understand or have experienced what each other is going through, so it’s a wonderful place to seek support.

This community and camaraderie extends outside of the clinic, into support groups. Most heart failure clinics have support groups for patients, and many also have groups just for caregivers. Since caregivers carry significant responsibility, it’s important they receive support too. Hearing the experiences, challenges and successes of other caregivers and sharing one’s own experience can go a long way to supporting the caregiver’s emotional health. Ask your care team about support groups in your area.



**A patient who is actively involved in making decisions about their health is likely to have better outcomes.<sup>1</sup>**