

IMPROVING HEART FAILURE CARE

HOW RECENT PROFESSIONAL GUIDELINES CAN BEST SUPPORT WOMEN WITH HEART FAILURE

Professional heart failure care guidelines, including those from the American Heart Association (AHA), can help doctors navigate cross-specialty collaboration, treatment, lifestyle and mental health care with women with heart failure.

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HEART**[®]



The below recommendations were created in collaboration with *Hear Your Heart* program cardiologists:



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AHA Guidelines: **Collaboration Is Key**



Team-based, connected care that's specific to women with heart failure can improve health outcomes and help women better utilize health services available to them.

"For Black and Latina women, many unique challenges and barriers prevent optimal care. Most women care for all those around them, often at the expense of their own health, and **a variety of social determinants of health**, including health literacy, socioeconomic and environmental influences, **can contribute to poor health outcomes**. Routine assessment for social determinants of health can help inform tailored treatment and lifestyle change recommendations.¹"

- Dr. Contreras

> Next Steps

Work with the full care team for women living with heart failure—including primary care physicians—by communicating necessary health information in a timely manner, keeping their records updated and asking about updates from other specialists.



Facilitate shared decision-making with women with heart failure on risk assessment, testing and treatment.

"Because of distrust in the medical system, some Black and Latina women may not feel comfortable going to the doctor and may not be active in their care. Shared decision-making means considering a woman's goals with medical expertise for an **evidence-based, personalized treatment approach** that encourages engagement in their care decisions.²"

- Dr. Morris

> Next Steps

Help women with heart failure **take an active role in their care by asking about their goals, values and preferences**, sharing evidence-based recommendations and leaving time for questions at the end of the visit.

AHA Guidelines: Treatment Adherence



It's important that women with heart failure **adhere to their medication regimen and talk to their doctor about any issues or symptoms they experience to get ahead of any complications.**

"Women know their bodies best and there isn't a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to care for Black and Latina women. Better care starts with better understanding, and some issues related to poor or non-adherence could be preventable through stronger communication practices.³"

- Dr. Morris

➤ Next Steps

Encourage women with heart failure to **consistently track their symptoms and irregularities** and ensure these are included within their question list between visits.

AHA Guidelines: Lifestyle and Mental Health



Nutrition, in addition to medication, is an important part of managing heart failure. Diets should include vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, whole grains and lean proteins, with minimal sodium and processed meats.⁴

"It's important that Black and Latina women with heart failure know that **they don't have to give up everything they love when it comes to food**—they just have to find balance and learn to cook in a way that's healthier for their heart."

- Dr. Contreras

Acknowledge mental health strains imposed on women with heart failure, and proactively discuss options for supporting their mental health.

"35% of people with heart failure meet the criteria for clinical depression.⁶ And data shows that Black women already report higher levels of stress than white women,⁷ which can harm the heart. As providers, we should be prepared to have honest conversations about the strain that heart failure can put on mental health."

- Dr. Morris

Physical activity, including cardiac rehabilitation, can help prevent other cardiovascular events and build heart-healthy habits.

"The benefits of regular aerobic activity can't be understated—**it strengthens the heart and body, relieves symptoms of heart problems, increases energy** and more.⁸ And even though cardiac rehabilitation has been shown to decrease morbidity and mortality, data also shows that Black and Latina women with heart failure are less likely to be referred to these types of specialized units.⁹"

- Dr. Contreras

➤ Next Steps

Urge women with heart failure to **keep an eye on salt, saturated fat and refined carbohydrates intake.** The Mediterranean or DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diets can be helpful starting points to promote heart-healthy dietary habits.⁵

➤ Next Steps

Ask women with heart failure to **share regular updates on their mental and emotional well-being:**

- How are you coping with the challenges of living with heart failure?
- How has your mental health changed since our last visit?
- Are there any new stressors in your life that may have a negative impact on your mental health?

Be sure to listen for any **symptoms of mental distress** to ensure they're receiving proper mental health services and necessary resources as early as possible.

➤ Next Steps

Talk to women with heart failure about the importance of physical activity and getting at least **150 minutes per week of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity**, such as brisk walking, dancing, gardening or biking.¹⁰

Visit [HFHearYourHeart.com](https://www.heart.org/healthycare) for more information to support Black and Latina women living with heart failure.

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MPR-US-102778

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