

National Heart Foundation of Australia
and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand

Guidelines for the prevention, detection and management of chronic heart failure in Australia, 2006



**Heart
Foundation**



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Based on a review of evidence published up to 30 September 2005.

ISBN 1 921226 03 X

Suggested citation:

National Heart Foundation of Australia and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand (Chronic Heart Failure Guidelines Expert Writing Panel). Guidelines for the prevention, detection and management of chronic heart failure in Australia, 2006.

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Executive summary

Chronic heart failure (CHF) is a complex clinical syndrome with typical symptoms (e.g. dyspnoea, fatigue) that can occur at rest or on effort, and is characterised by objective evidence of an underlying structural abnormality or cardiac dysfunction that impairs the ability of the ventricle to fill with or eject blood (particularly during physical activity).

Common causes of CHF are ischaemic heart disease (present in over 50% of new cases), hypertension (about two-thirds of cases) and idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy (around 5–10% of cases).

Diagnosis is based on clinical features, chest x-ray and objective measurement of ventricular function (e.g. echocardiography). Plasma levels of B-type natriuretic peptide may have a role in diagnosis, primarily as a test for exclusion. Diagnosis may be strengthened by improvement in symptoms in response to treatment.

Management involves prevention, early detection, slowing of disease progression, relief of symptoms, minimisation of exacerbations, and prolongation of survival. Key therapeutic approaches or considerations include:

- non-pharmacological strategies, including physical activity, diet and risk-factor modification
- angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors (ACEIs) that prevent disease progression and prolong survival in all grades of CHF severity
- beta-blockers that prolong survival when added to ACEIs in symptomatic patients
- diuretics that provide symptom relief and restoration or maintenance of euvolaemia; often aided by daily self-recording of body weight and adjustments of diuretic dosage
- aldosterone receptor antagonists (aldosterone antagonists), angiotensin II receptor antagonists and digoxin, which may be useful in selected patients
- biventricular pacing, which may have a role in New York Heart Association Class III or IV patients with wide QRS complexes in improving physical activity tolerance and quality of life, as well as reducing mortality
- implantable cardioverter defibrillators, which have been shown to reduce the risk of sudden cardiac death in patients with CHF and severe systolic dysfunction of the left ventricle
- surgical approaches in highly selected patients that may include myocardial revascularisation, insertion of devices and cardiac transplantation
- post-discharge multidisciplinary management programs and palliative care strategies
- drugs to avoid include anti-arrhythmic agents (apart from beta-blockers and amiodarone), non-dihydropyridine calcium-channel antagonists (in systolic CHF), tricyclic antidepressants, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and COX-2 inhibitors, thiazolidinediones and tumour necrosis factor antagonists

CHF is often accompanied by important comorbid conditions that require specific intervention. These include concomitant ischaemic heart disease, valvular disease, arrhythmia, arthritis, gout, renal dysfunction, anaemia, diabetes and sleep apnoea.

Heart failure with preserved systolic function (HFPSF), or diastolic heart failure, is common and may account for up to 40% of patients with CHF. Definitive diagnosis is difficult and treatment is empirical. Angiotensin II receptor antagonists and beta-blockers have not demonstrated sufficient benefit to warrant these agents being considered mandatory therapy in this setting.

Ideally, specialist opinion should be obtained for all patients with CHF, in view of the severity, the symptomatic limitation, the prognosis and the complex nature of the condition and its management. Specialist care has been shown to improve outcomes, reduce hospitalisation and improve symptoms in patients with heart failure (**Level IIB**). See **Section 13** on post-discharge management programs.

At a minimum, such as for patients who are geographically isolated, specialist opinion should be sought:

- when the diagnosis is in question
- when there is a question regarding management issues
- when the patient is being considered for revascularisation (percutaneous or surgical)
- when the patient is being considered for a pacemaker, defibrillator or resynchronisation device
- when the patient is being considered for heart or heart/lung transplantation
- at the request of the local medical officer to help guide management and clarify prognosis
- in patients under 65 years of age.

The treatment of acute decompensated heart failure is complex and involves appropriate use of oxygen and pharmacological therapies including morphine, diuretics and nitrates, as well as non-invasive mechanical therapies such as continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) via mask, or bilevel non-invasive positive-pressure (BiPAP) ventilation. Patients with advanced decompensation may require inotropic support, assisted ventilation, intra-aortic balloon counterpulsation and, in extreme cases, ventricular assist devices.

1

Scope and objectives

These guidelines are a revision of the 2002 National Heart Foundation of Australia and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand *Guidelines on Contemporary Management of the Patient with Chronic Heart Failure in Australia*. These guidelines summarise available published evidence until September 2005 for the most effective diagnosis, management and prevention of chronic heart failure (CHF).

The aims of these guidelines are to:

- obtain better health outcomes by improving the management of CHF
- reduce unwarranted variation from best practice treatment of CHF throughout Australia.

The target audiences include:

- general practitioners (GPs)
- general physicians, cardiologists, registrars and hospital resident medical officers
- nurses and other allied health professionals
- educators.

The guidelines provide evidence-based recommendations for management of CHF, based on criteria developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (see [Appendix I](#)). Recommendations based on consensus expert opinion are also included where evidence-based recommendations are not available.

The guidelines are not prescriptive, as patient circumstances and clinical judgement will determine the most appropriate course of treatment for each individual with CHF. Clinical trials provide group data and clinical practice requires individual judgement.

Throughout this document, boxed 'practice points' highlight key issues, while summaries of recommendations are provided for most sections.

Figure 1.1 outlines the individual sections of the guidelines and how they relate to the natural history of CHF.

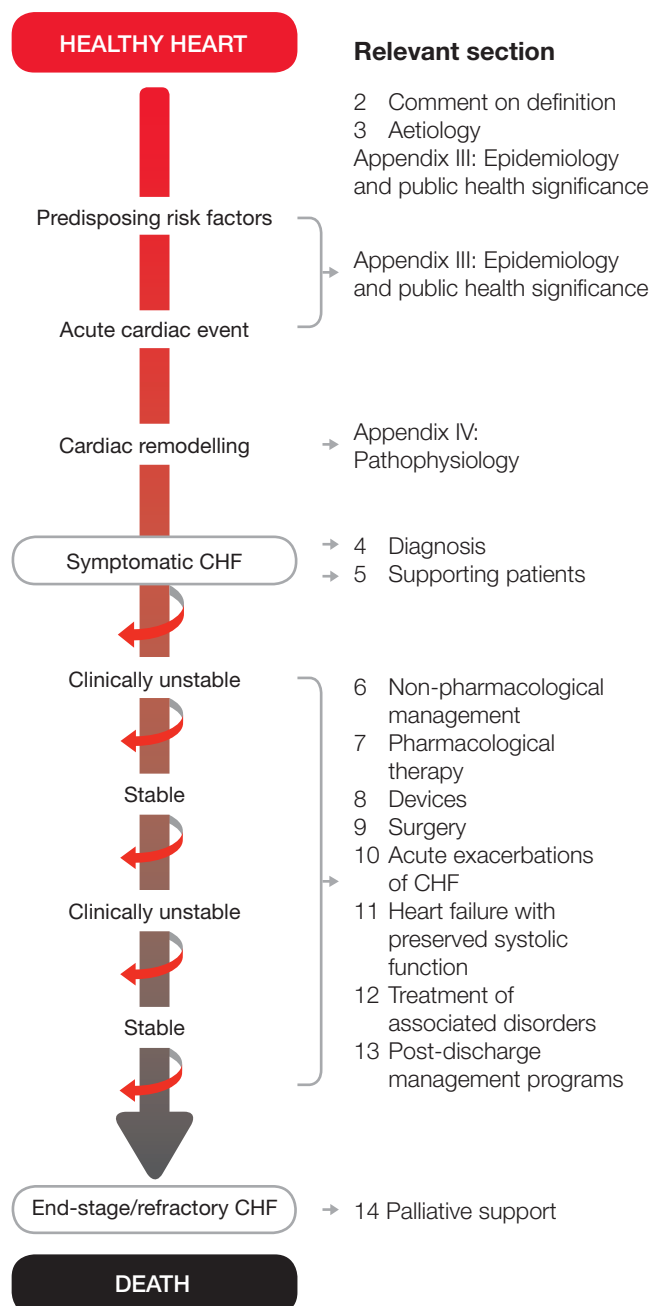
The core and the wider writing group, as well as the review organisations for these guidelines, are outlined in [Appendix II](#).

Additional copies of these guidelines are available through **Heartline (1300 36 27 87 or heartline@heartfoundation.com.au)** and through the websites of the Heart Foundation (www.heartfoundation.com.au) and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand (www.csanz.com.au).

1.1 Natural history of CHF

Figure 1.1

Diagram of the natural history of CHF and the relevant sections of these guidelines





2

Comment on definition

The definition of CHF is somewhat controversial. **Table 2.1** summarises the key definitions of CHF used over the past four decades. Some clinicians base the diagnosis purely on clinical criteria, which have been developed for use in epidemiological studies.¹ However, it is generally accepted that the diagnosis of CHF requires both clinical features and an objective measure of abnormal ventricular function. This is best represented by the definition proposed by the European Task Force on Heart Failure (2005).²

Definitions usually include either systolic or diastolic dysfunction of the ventricle(s), or a combination of both. There is much more trial evidence pertaining to systolic ventricular dysfunction. However, the management of diastolic dysfunction, which often coexists, is also included here because of its importance in an increasingly ageing population with high rates of hypertension.

Systolic heart failure refers to a weakened ability of the heart to contract in systole, and remains the most common cause of CHF. This reflects the prevalence of coronary heart disease (CHD) in the Western world, although hypertension is still a significant contributor to systolic heart failure.³

Heart failure with preserved systolic function (HFPSF), or diastolic heart failure, refers to impaired diastolic filling of the left ventricle because of slow early relaxation or increased myocardial stiffness resulting in higher filling pressures, with or without impaired systolic contraction. It is difficult to obtain accurate data regarding prevalence of diastolic heart failure, but it is certainly more common in the elderly, where ischaemia, hypertrophy and age-related fibrosis may all act to impair diastolic filling of the heart.⁴

In this context, the working definition of CHF used to compile these guidelines is as follows:

CHF is a complex clinical syndrome with typical symptoms (e.g. dyspnoea, fatigue) that can occur at rest or on effort, and is characterised by objective evidence of an underlying structural abnormality or cardiac dysfunction that impairs the ability of the ventricle to fill with or eject blood (particularly during physical activity).

A diagnosis of CHF may be further strengthened by improvement in symptoms in response to treatment.

Table 2.1
Key definitions of CHF

Wood, 1968 ⁵	'A state in which the heart fails to maintain an adequate circulation for the needs of the body despite a satisfactory venous filling pressure.'
Braunwald & Grossman, 1992 ⁶	'A state in which an abnormality of cardiac function is responsible for the failure of the heart to pump blood at a rate commensurate with the requirements of the metabolising tissues or, to do so only from an elevated filling pressure.'
Packer, 1988 ⁷	'A complex clinical syndrome characterised by abnormalities of left ventricular function and neurohormonal regulation which are accompanied by effort intolerance, fluid retention and reduced longevity.'
Poole-Wilson, 1987 ⁸	'A clinical syndrome caused by an abnormality of the heart and recognised by a characteristic pattern of haemodynamic, renal, neural and hormonal responses.'
ACC/AHA Heart Failure Guidelines, 2005 ⁹	'Heart failure is a complex clinical syndrome that can result from any structural or functional cardiac disorder that impairs the ability of the ventricle to fill with or eject blood.'
European Task Force on Heart Failure, 2005 ²	'A syndrome in which the patients should have the following features: symptoms of heart failure, typically breathlessness or fatigue, either at rest or during exertion, or ankle swelling and objective evidence of cardiac dysfunction at rest.'

Adapted from Byrne J, Davie AP and McMurray JJV, 2004¹⁰

3

Aetiology

Overall, CHF occurs in 1.5–2.0% of Australians. However, the overall pattern of CHF shows that its incidence and prevalence rises markedly with age.^{11,12} The point prevalence of CHF has been about 1% in people aged 50–59 years, 10% in people aged 65 years or more, and over 50% in people aged 85 years or more.^{13,14} It is one of the most common reasons for hospital admission and GP consultation in people aged 70 and older.

Although systolic heart failure and HFPSF often coexist, the distinction between them is relevant to the therapeutic approach.

3.1 Causes of systolic heart failure (impaired ventricular contraction)

Common causes

- CHD and prior myocardial infarction (MI) account for approximately two-thirds of systolic heart failure cases. Ischaemic heart disease is present in over 50% of new cases.
- Essential hypertension may contribute to heart failure via increased afterload and acceleration of CHD.¹¹ Hypertension is present in about two-thirds of new cases.

Less common causes

- Non-ischaemic idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy — patients tend to be younger, and at least 30% of cases appear to be familial.¹⁵ Idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy is present in approximately 5–10% of new cases.

Uncommon causes

- Valvular heart disease, especially mitral and aortic incompetence.
- Non-ischaemic dilated cardiomyopathy secondary to long-term alcohol misuse.
- Inflammatory cardiomyopathy, or myocarditis, traditionally associated with a history of viral infections, e.g. enteroviruses (especially Coxsackie B virus).
- Chronic arrhythmia.
- Thyroid dysfunction (hyperthyroidism, hypothyroidism).
- HIV-related cardiomyopathy.

- Drug-induced cardiomyopathy, especially associated with anthracyclines such as daunorubicin and doxorubicin, cyclophosphamide, paclitaxel and mitoxantrone.
- Peripartum cardiomyopathy, a rare cause of systolic failure.

3.2 Causes of heart failure with preserved systolic function (impaired relaxation)

Common causes

- Hypertension (especially systolic hypertension). Patients tend to be female and elderly. This cause now represents 40–50% of all hospital admissions for CHF.
- CHD, which may lead to impaired myocardial relaxation.
- Diabetes — men with diabetes are twice as likely to develop heart failure than men without diabetes, and women with diabetes are at a five-fold greater risk than women without diabetes. These differences persist after taking into account age, blood pressure, weight, cholesterol and known coronary artery disease. Myocardial ischaemia is very common in diabetes and is aggravated by hyperglycaemia, as well as concomitant hypertension and hyperlipidaemia. However, diabetes is additionally associated (independent of ischaemia) with interstitial fibrosis, myocyte hypertrophy and apoptosis, as well as both autonomic and endothelial dysfunction, all of which may contribute to the diabetic cardiomyopathic state.¹⁶

Less common causes

- Valvular disease, particularly aortic stenosis.

Uncommon causes

- Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy — most cases are hereditary.
- Restrictive cardiomyopathy, either idiopathic or secondary to infiltrative disease, such as amyloidosis.



4 Diagnosis

While the provisional diagnosis of CHF is made on clinical grounds, it is imperative that investigations are performed to confirm the diagnosis. Furthermore, the context is important. Doctors should have a higher index of suspicion in patients with recognised risk factors such as a previous MI or hypertension.

4.1 Symptoms of CHF

A full medical history is important, both in determining the cause/s of CHF (including past history of CHD, hypertension, or rheumatic fever; alcohol consumption; family history of CHF or cardiomyopathy), and assessing the severity of the disease.

In patients with left ventricular (LV) dysfunction, symptoms of CHF may develop relatively late. Furthermore, many patients claim to be asymptomatic, largely due to their sedentary lifestyle.

The following symptoms may occur in patients with CHF.

- Exertional dyspnoea is present in most patients, initially with more strenuous exertion, but later progresses to occur on level walking and eventually at rest. It also occurs in many other conditions.
- Orthopnoea — patients may prop themselves up on a number of pillows to sleep. This indicates that the symptoms are more likely to be due to CHF, but occur at a later stage.
- Paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnoea (PND) also indicates that the symptoms are more likely to be due to CHF, but most patients with CHF do not have PND.
- Dry irritating cough may occur, particularly at night. Patients may be mistakenly treated for asthma, bronchitis or angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor (ACEI)-induced cough.
- Fatigue and weakness may be prominent, but are common in other conditions.
- Dizzy spells or palpitations which may indicate an arrhythmia.

Symptoms related to fluid retention may occur in patients with more advanced CHF, such as epigastric pain, abdominal distension, ascites, and sacral and peripheral oedema. In some patients, a therapeutic trial of diuretic therapy may be useful. A successful response increases the likelihood that the symptoms are due to CHF.

Practice point

Clinical diagnosis of CHF is often unreliable, especially in obese patients, those with pulmonary disease and the elderly. Therefore, it is important to perform investigations to confirm the diagnosis.

4.2 Symptom classification

New York Heart Association grading

The traditional system for symptom classification in CHF is the New York Heart Association (NYHA) grading system (see [Table 4.1](#)). Physicians may differ in their interpretation of grades.

Table 4.1
NYHA grading of symptoms in chronic heart failure

NYHA grading		MET
Class I	No limitations. Ordinary physical activity does not cause undue fatigue, dyspnoea or palpitations (asymptomatic LV dysfunction).	>7
Class II	Slight limitation of physical activity. Ordinary physical activity results in fatigue, palpitation, dyspnoea or angina pectoris (mild CHF).	5
Class III	Marked limitation of physical activity. Less than ordinary physical activity leads to symptoms (moderate CHF).	2–3
Class IV	Unable to carry on any physical activity without discomfort. Symptoms of CHF present at rest (severe CHF).	1.6

MET (*metabolic equivalent*) is defined as the resting VO_2 for a 40-year-old 70 kg man. 1 MET = 3.5 mL O_2 /min/kg body weight

4.3 Physical examination

A careful physical examination is important for initial diagnosis of CHF, identification of potential causes or aggravating factors, and ongoing evaluation of disease status.

It is very important to appreciate that patients with CHF may show no detectable abnormal physical signs, because they are typically a late manifestation. Furthermore, many of the signs may occur in other conditions. It may also be difficult to detect physical signs that are present unless the doctor is experienced in examining CHF patients. Consequently, investigations for suspected CHF should often be initiated on the basis of symptoms alone, most commonly unexplained breathlessness.

The following signs may be present:

- signs of underlying cardiac disease, including a displaced apex beat, or a murmur which may indicate underlying valve disease
- signs of fluid retention, including soft basal inspiratory crepitations which do not clear with coughing, resting tachypnoea (requiring the patient to sit up to obtain relief), raised jugular venous pressure, ankle and sacral oedema, ascites or tender hepatomegaly
- signs of cardiac strain, including tachycardia or a third heart sound
- other abnormal vital signs such as reduced arterial oxygen saturation.

4.4 Diagnostic investigations

Investigation is imperative in any patient with suspected CHF (even in the presence of a normal examination). As a minimum, this should include an electrocardiogram (ECG), chest x-ray, echocardiogram, and measurement of plasma electrolytes and full blood count.

The purpose of investigating CHF is to:

- confirm the clinical diagnosis
- determine the mechanism (e.g. LV systolic dysfunction, LV diastolic dysfunction, valvular heart disease)
- identify a cause (e.g. CHD, hypertension)
- identify exacerbating and precipitating factors (e.g. arrhythmias, ischaemia, anaemia, pulmonary embolism, infection)
- guide therapy
- determine prognosis.

Initial investigations

ECG

The ECG is seldom normal, but abnormalities are frequently non-specific. The most common are non-specific repolarisation abnormalities (ST–T wave changes). A completely normal ECG makes a diagnosis of CHF due to LV systolic dysfunction less likely.¹⁷ However, it does not exclude other causes of CHF. In a recent study of patients referred by GPs, almost 20% of patients with confirmed CHF had a completely normal ECG.¹⁸

Conduction abnormalities may be seen, including:

- left bundle branch block
- first-degree atrioventricular block
- left anterior hemi-block
- non-specific intraventricular conduction delays.

Other abnormal findings include:

- LV hypertrophy
- evidence of previous Q wave MI in patients with CHD
- sinus tachycardia (due to increased activity of the adrenergic nervous system)
- atrial fibrillation (prevalence increases with increasing age in patients with CHF).

Chest x-ray

A chest x-ray is important in making a diagnosis of CHF, but a normal chest x-ray does not exclude the diagnosis (especially in the outpatient setting). The frequency of abnormal findings depends on the timing of the x-ray. Cardiomegaly and pulmonary venous redistribution with upper lobe blood diversion are common.

With worsening CHF, evidence of interstitial oedema may be present. This is seen particularly in the perihilar region, with prominent vascular markings and, frequently, small basal pleural effusions obscuring the costophrenic angle. Kerley B lines, indicative of lymphatic oedema due to raised left atrial pressure, may be present. Furthermore, a chest x-ray may reveal an alternative explanation for the patient's symptoms.

Trans-thoracic echocardiography

All patients with suspected CHF should have an echocardiogram, the single most useful investigation in such patients. The echocardiogram can make the all-important distinction between systolic dysfunction (typically an LV ejection fraction <40%) and normal resting systolic function, associated with abnormal diastolic filling, while also excluding correctable causes of CHF, such as valvular disease. It is non-invasive, safe and relatively cheap compared with other imaging modalities.



The echocardiogram gives information about:

- left and right ventricular size, volumes and ventricular wall thickness, and the presence of regional scarring
- left and right ventricular systolic function — the global ejection fraction as well as regional wall motion analysis in patients with CHD is readily performed in most patients
- LV thrombus
- LV diastolic function and filling pressures — transmitral and pulmonary venous pulsed-wave Doppler and tissue Doppler studies are useful to detect diastolic dysfunction and determine ventricular filling pressures, but Doppler indices of elevated filling pressure are more reliable when systolic function is impaired
- left and right atrial size — enlargement is an important manifestation of chronically elevated filling pressure
- valvular structure and function — assessment of the severity of valvular stenosis or incompetence and whether CHF can be explained by the valve lesion
- pulmonary systolic pressure – in most patients this can be estimated by Doppler echo
- pericardial disease, a rare but correctable cause of CHF.

Note: Trans-oesophageal echocardiography may be undertaken at a later stage in specific situations (e.g. assessment of mitral valve disease, prosthetic valve dysfunction, exclusion of left atrial thrombus). Gated radionuclide angiography provides a reproducible measure of left and right ventricular ejection fraction, as well as regional wall motion analysis. It requires the administration of a radionuclide tracer, and is generally performed when echocardiography is either not available or non-diagnostic due to poor acoustic windows.

Peripheral markers

Full blood count

Mild anaemia may occur in patients with CHF and is associated with an adverse prognosis. Uncommonly, severe anaemia may be a cause of CHF. All forms of anaemia should be investigated.

Mild thrombocytopenia may occur due to secondary chronic liver dysfunction, or as an adverse effect of drugs such as diuretics.¹⁹

Urea, creatinine and electrolytes

Plasma urea, creatinine and electrolytes should be measured as part of the initial workup and monitored regularly (e.g. every 6 months) in stable patients. They should also be checked if there are any changes in clinical status or drug therapy (i.e. diuretics, ACEIs, angiotensin II receptor antagonists, aldosterone antagonists).

The plasma electrolytes in mild and moderate CHF are usually normal. However, in more advanced CHF, the following changes may occur:

- dilutional hyponatraemia, exacerbated by high-dose diuretic therapy
- elevated plasma potassium in the presence of impaired renal function, or resulting from the use of potassium-sparing diuretics, ACE inhibitors, or angiotensin II receptor antagonists and aldosterone antagonists
- hypokalaemia is more common and is often secondary to therapy, with thiazide or loop diuretics
- plasma magnesium levels may be reduced due to the effects of diuretic therapy; magnesium replacement to normal levels reduces ectopic beats and helps normalise potassium levels
- renal blood flow and glomerular filtration rate fall as CHF progresses and plasma creatinine rises. This may be worsened by drug therapy, including diuretics, ACE inhibitors and angiotensin II receptor antagonists.

Liver function tests

Congestive hepatomegaly results in abnormal liver function tests (elevated levels of AST, ALT and LDH). There may be a rise in serum bilirubin, particularly in severe CHF. In long-standing CHF, albumin synthesis may be impaired, resulting in hypoalbuminaemia. The latter finding may also indicate cardiac cirrhosis.

Thyroid function

Hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism are uncommon causes of CHF. Thyroid function tests should be considered, especially in older patients without pre-existing CHD who develop atrial fibrillation, or who have no other obvious cause of CHF identified.

Assessment of myocardial ischaemia and viability

Detection of myocardial ischaemia and viability plays an important role in the assessment of patients with myocardial dysfunction and CHD. Furthermore, dyspnoea on exertion is a frequent manifestation of inducible myocardial ischaemia, sometimes referred to as an 'angina equivalent'.

Consequently, if the echocardiogram at rest fails to provide an explanation for dyspnoea on exertion, stress testing may be indicated to exclude ischaemia as the cause. The type of stress test that should be performed (stress ECG, stress echocardiography or stress nuclear study — see below) will depend on patient characteristics and test availability, and may be decided in consultation with a cardiologist or physician, if necessary.

Inducible ischaemia can be assessed with numerous stress protocols, using either technetium-99m-labelled agents or thallium-201. Many patients

have limited physical activity capacity and therefore pharmacological stress testing — e.g. using dipyridamole or dobutamine — is more appropriate. Stress echocardiography is another alternative using either physical activity or dobutamine.

Myocardial viability can be assessed using single photon emission tomography with thallium-201 or technetium-99m perfusion tracers, low-dose dobutamine stress echocardiography, or positron emission tomography (PET) with fluorodeoxyglucose. PET remains the gold standard for detecting viability but is not widely available, and nuclear imaging and dobutamine echocardiography are only marginally less sensitive. Moreover, dobutamine echocardiography appears to provide greater specificity in recognising viable segments that will improve with revascularisation.

Large prospective randomised trials are not available, but a meta-analysis of numerous small retrospective observational studies demonstrated a strong association between myocardial viability on non-invasive testing and improved survival after revascularisation in patients with CHD and LV dysfunction.²⁰

Protocols to assess ischaemia and myocardial viability using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) have been developed, but are not widely available.

Coronary angiography

Coronary angiography should be considered in CHF patients with a history of exertional angina or suspected ischaemic LV dysfunction, including those with a strong risk factor profile for CHD. Although the majority of patients with ischaemic LV dysfunction will have a clear history of previous MI, occasionally patients may present with clinical features of CHF without obvious angina or prior history of ischaemic events.

In addition, as noted above, some patients who present with dyspnoea on exertion without chest pain have underlying CHD as the cause, and should be referred for coronary angiography if stress testing is positive. Coronary angiography may also have therapeutic implications, since selected patients with ischaemic CHF may benefit from myocardial revascularisation.^{21–24}

Haemodynamic testing

Invasive measurement of haemodynamics may be particularly helpful in a small proportion of patients for whom:

- CHF appears refractory to therapy
- the diagnosis of CHF is in doubt
- diastolic heart failure is recurrent and difficult to confirm by other means.

Haemodynamic measurements are typically made at rest, but pressure recordings can be made during physical activity in patients with exertional symptoms and normal resting haemodynamics, and in whom

secondary pulmonary hypertension is suspected. Haemodynamic measurements also provide prognostic information.²⁵

Endomyocardial biopsy

Endomyocardial biopsy is indicated rarely in patients with dilated cardiomyopathy, recent onset of symptoms (<3 months) and where any reasonable expectation of CHD has been excluded by angiography. While a subacute lymphocytic infiltrate occurs in 10% of patients with otherwise idiopathic cardiomyopathy, histological evidence of fulminant myocarditis likely to respond to immunosuppression tends to be rare (2% of cases). The exception is where there is other evidence for myocarditis, such as fever, elevated erythrocyte sedimentation rate, relatively preserved wall thickness with reduced LV contraction, or concomitant viral illness.²⁶

Biopsy findings may also be specific in sarcoidosis, giant cell myocarditis, amyloidosis or haemochromatosis. Right ventricular biopsy is generally performed via the right internal jugular vein or right femoral vein, and the results are generally considered to be representative of LV histology.

Natriuretic peptides

Plasma levels of atrial natriuretic peptide (ANP) and B-type natriuretic peptide (BNP) reflect the severity of CHF, the risk of hospitalisation and prospect of survival. BNP and N-terminal proBNP levels have been shown to predict all-cause mortality, including death from pump failure and sudden death.^{27,28} Furthermore, changes in BNP levels in response to medical therapy also predict survival.²⁸

They have been demonstrated to be useful for differentiating dyspnoea caused by CHF from dyspnoea due to other causes.^{18,29–33} This reduced both the time to initiation of the most appropriate therapy and the length of hospital stay.³⁴ BNP and N-terminal proBNP levels vary with age, sex and renal function. However, in one large study, a BNP level less than 50 pg/mL had a 96% negative predictive value. A cut-off value of 100 pg/mL had a sensitivity of 90% and a specificity of 76%.³⁰

BNP levels appear more useful in detecting CHF due to LV systolic dysfunction than diastolic dysfunction.³⁵ In particular, BNP levels do not appear to discriminate well between elderly female patients with diastolic heart failure — the most common patient group with this condition — and healthy age-matched controls. Furthermore, mildly raised levels can be due to other causes, including cor pulmonale and pulmonary embolism. Clinical judgement should always prevail.

Measurement of BNP or N-terminal proBNP is not recommended as routine in the diagnosis of CHF. Its clinical use depends on the context in which the patient is being evaluated. Patients in whom the initial clinical assessment indicates a very high likelihood of CHF (e.g. good history of PND, S3 gallop, raised jugular venous pressure, radiological evidence of pulmonary oedema), should be treated as having



CHF and an echocardiogram arranged. In this setting, the negative predictive value of BNP or N-terminal proBNP will be reduced, and there is no evidence that BNP offers additional diagnostic information beyond that provided by a comprehensive echocardiogram.³⁶

However, in patients in whom the diagnosis is not clear following initial clinical assessment, and where an echocardiogram cannot be performed in a timely fashion (e.g. emergency room setting, long outpatient wait for echocardiogram), then measurement of BNP or N-terminal proBNP levels may be considered. In such patients, a normal BNP or N-terminal proBNP level makes the diagnosis of heart failure unlikely (especially if the patient is not taking cardioactive medication), and alternative diagnoses should be considered. If the BNP or N-terminal proBNP level is raised, further investigation, including echocardiography, is warranted.

Preliminary data in selected populations suggest that BNP measurement may also be useful in detecting LV dysfunction in high-risk populations. However, not all studies have confirmed this.^{37,38} Titration of drug therapy according to the plasma N-terminal proBNP level has been associated with reduced cardiovascular events in a small study.³⁹ Further large randomised studies are underway.

Spirometry and respiratory function testing

These are useful to exclude concomitant smoking-related or other causes of airway limitation. The FEV₁ may be reduced and reversibility demonstrable in reaction to an elevated pulmonary capillary wedge pressure ('cardiac asthma'). Gas transfer will be reduced in moderate CHF, generally down to 50% of predicted value.⁴⁰⁻⁴³

Recommendations relating to the diagnostic investigation of CHF are shown in [Table 4.2](#).

Practice point

The classic symptom of CHF is exertional dyspnoea or fatigue. Orthopnoea, PND and ankle oedema may appear at a later stage.

Physical signs are often normal in the early stages. Examination should include assessment of vital signs, cardiac auscultation (murmurs, S3 gallop) and checking for signs of fluid retention (e.g. raised jugular venous pressure, peripheral oedema, basal inspiratory crepitations).

All patients with suspected CHF should undergo an ECG, chest x-ray and echocardiogram, even if the physical signs are normal.

Full blood count, plasma urea, creatinine and electrolytes should be measured during the initial workup, and if there are any changes in the patient's clinical status. Urea, creatinine and electrolytes should also be checked regularly in stable patients, and when changes are made to medical therapy.

The role of plasma BNP measurements is evolving, but it has been shown to improve diagnostic accuracy in patients presenting with unexplained dyspnoea. In patients with new symptoms, where the diagnosis is not clear following the initial clinical assessment and an echocardiogram cannot be organised in a timely fashion, then measurement of BNP or N-terminal proBNP may be helpful. In this setting, a normal level makes the diagnosis of heart failure unlikely (especially if the patient is not taking cardioactive medication). If the level is raised, further investigation — including echocardiography — is warranted.

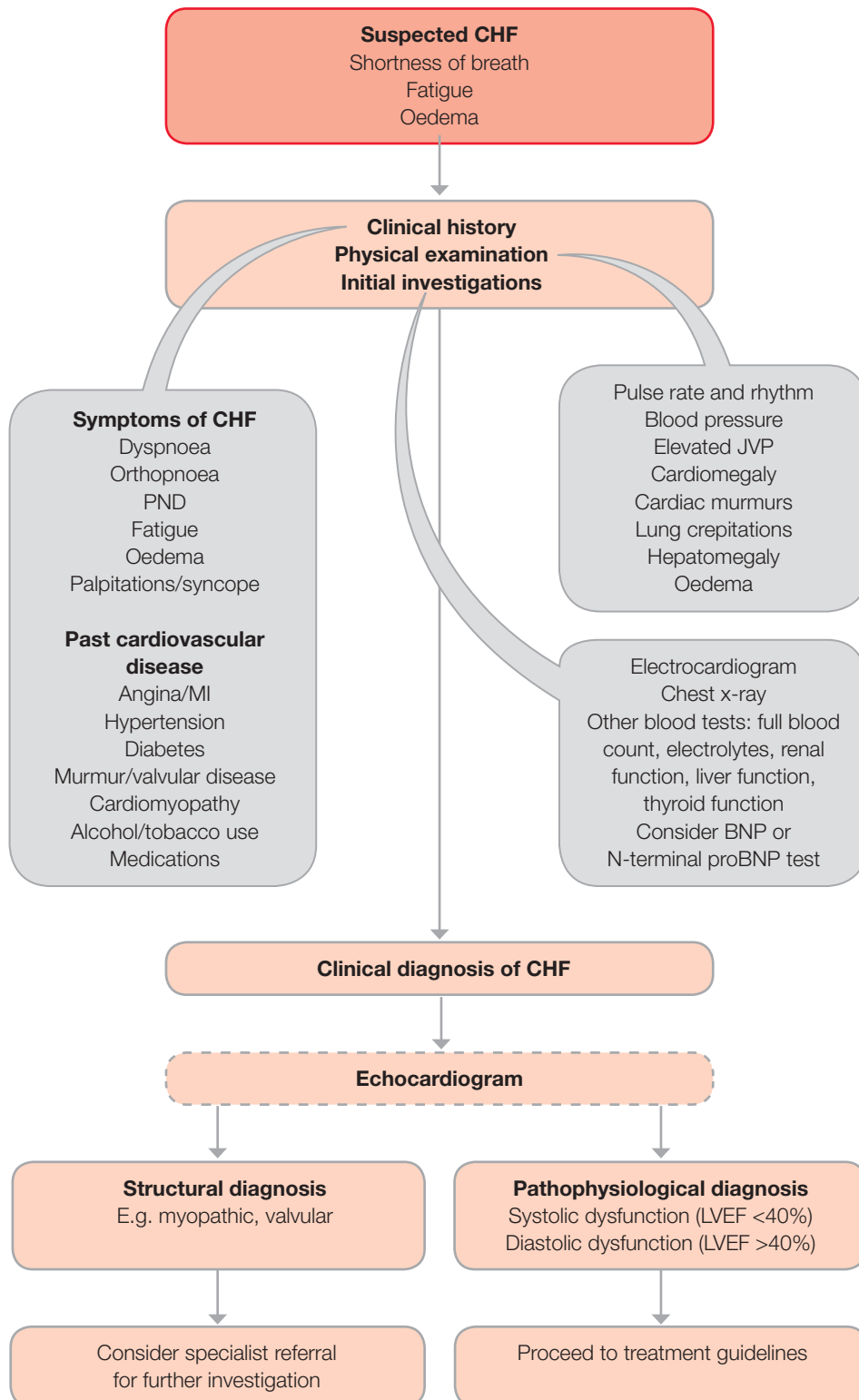
Underlying aggravating or precipitating factors (e.g. arrhythmias, ischaemia, non-adherence to diet or medications, infections, anaemia, thyroid disease, addition of exacerbating medications) should be considered and managed appropriately.

Table 4.2
Recommendations for diagnostic investigation of CHF

	Grade of recommendation
All patients with suspected CHF should undergo an echocardiogram to improve diagnostic accuracy and determine the mechanism of heart failure.	D
Coronary angiography should be considered in patients with a history of exertional angina or suspected ischaemic LV dysfunction.	D
Plasma BNP measurement may be helpful in patients presenting with recent-onset dyspnoea; it has been shown to improve diagnostic accuracy with a high negative predictive value. ²⁷	B
Haemodynamic measurements may be particularly helpful in patients with refractory CHF, recurrent HFPSF (diastolic CHF), or in whom the diagnosis of CHF is in doubt. ²⁵	D
Endomyocardial biopsy may be indicated in patients with cardiomyopathy with recent onset of symptoms, where CHD has been excluded by angiography, or where an inflammatory or infiltrative process is suspected. ²⁶	D
Nuclear cardiology, stress echocardiography and PET can be used to assess reversibility of ischaemia and viability of myocardium in patients with CHF who have myocardial dysfunction and CHD. Protocols have been developed using MRI to assess ischaemia and myocardial viability, and to diagnose infiltrative disorders. However, MRI is not widely available.	D
Thyroid function tests should be considered, especially in older patients without pre-existing CHD who develop atrial fibrillation, or in whom no other cause of CHF is evident.	D



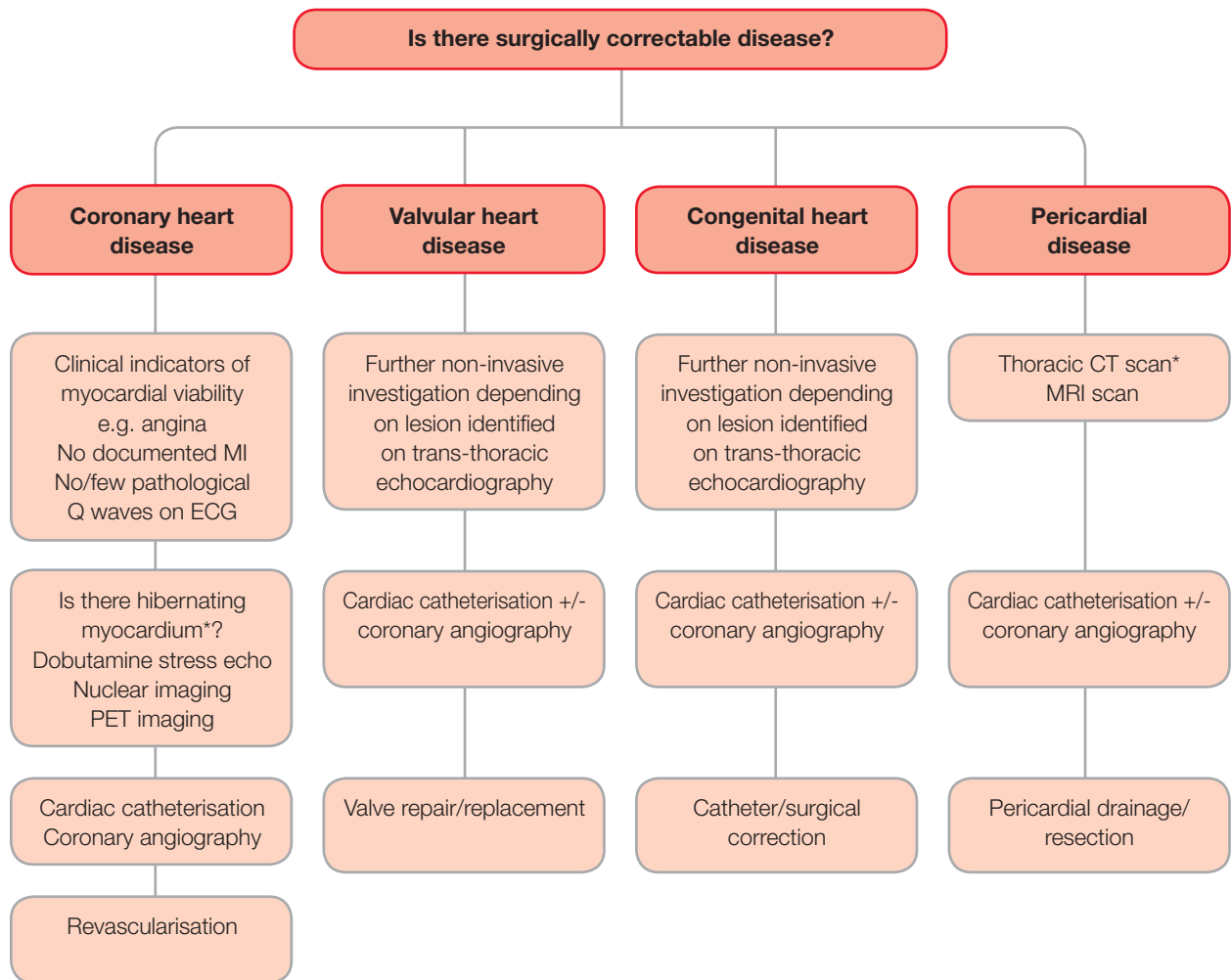
Figure 4.1
Diagnostic algorithm for CHF



BNP = B-type natriuretic peptide
 JVP = jugular venous pressure
 LVEF = left-ventricular ejection fraction
 MI = myocardial infarction
 PND = paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnoea

Figure 4.2

Advanced diagnostic/treatment algorithm for CHF



* The choice of imaging modality will vary according to local availability and institutional expertise

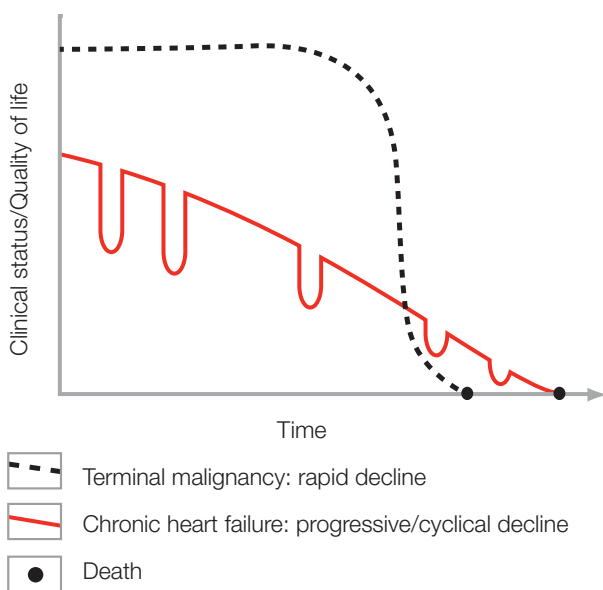


5 Supporting patients

CHF is a disabling and deadly condition that directly affects more than 300,000 Australians at any one time. Regardless of patients' clinical status (around one-third are hospitalised each year), the presence of CHF requires complex management and treatment protocols that place pressure on both the patient and their family/caregivers. The stress imposed on all concerned is, therefore, substantial.

Figure 5.1 shows the typical 'trajectory of illness' associated with CHF (cyclical and progressive clinical instability) compared to a terminal malignancy (typically rapid decline).

Figure 5.1
Typical trajectory of illness in CHF compared to a terminal malignancy



Adapted from Lynn J, 1997⁴⁴

Within this context, CHF is associated with the following:

- case-fatality rates comparable to the most common forms of cancer in both men and women⁴⁵
- quality of life worse than most other common forms of chronic disease and terminal cancer⁴⁶
- poor recognition of its deadly nature and impending death requiring palliative support.⁴⁷

The following sections outline the most effective strategies for providing support for patients. Despite the bleak picture outlined above, these strategies, if applied appropriately, have the potential to improve individual health outcomes markedly. They also have the potential to reduce the burden on the healthcare system. Given that more than a quarter of individuals with CHF live in rural and remote Australia,⁴⁸ delivery of gold-standard healthcare is particularly difficult. Specific strategies are needed to overcome the lack of specialist services in many regions of Australia.

Role of the patient

Patients, their caregivers and families can limit worsening of symptoms if they understand the basic principles of CHF management and learn to monitor daily the symptoms and signs of deterioration. Regardless of whether patients are enrolled into a specific management program (see Table 5.1), it is important that they understand the importance of self-care and the availability of supportive organisations.

Self-management involves the person taking responsibility for his or her own health. Therefore, the following information should be discussed and reviewed openly and often with each patient, as well as the patient's carers and family.

Table 5.1

Recommendations for discussion with patients with CHF

Lifestyle	Adopt a healthier lifestyle to address risk factors/conditions contributing to the development and progression of CHF (see Section 6 , Non-pharmacological management).
Personal issues	Understand the effect of CHF on personal energy levels, mood, depression, sleep disturbance and sexual function, and develop strategies to cope with changes and emotions related to family, work and social roles.
Medical issues	Consider practical issues related to pregnancy, contraception, genetic predisposition and practical items, such as an alert bracelet and a diary for daily weights/medications.
Support	Access to support services, such as Heart Support Australia, Cardiomyopathy Association of Australia, home help and financial assistance.

Effective management of CHF

There is a range of effective strategies available to support people with CHF to improve and prolong their lives and achieve a good end of life. These include:

- non-pharmacological strategies (e.g. physical activity programs and dietary/fluid management protocols)
- gold-standard pharmacotherapy (e.g. ACEIs and beta-blockers)
- surgical procedures and supportive devices (e.g. coronary artery bypass graft surgery and implantable defibrillators)
- post-discharge CHF management programs (e.g. home-based interventions)
- palliative care (e.g. advanced patient directives).

The effective management of CHF requires a combination of these strategies, and the full cooperation of patients and their families and caregivers whenever possible.

Practice point

Information for people with CHF can be obtained through the Heart Foundation's telephone information service, **Heartline 1300 36 27 87** (local call cost) and the Heart Foundation website: **www.heartfoundation.com.au**.

Patients should also consult their local phone directories for contact details for Heart Support Australia and the Cardiomyopathy Association of Australia in each state.



6

Non-pharmacological management

6.1 Identifying 'high-risk' patients

Most patients are frail and elderly with comorbidities (e.g. concurrent respiratory disease and renal dysfunction) likely to limit and/or complicate treatment. Although formal classification systems have been developed,⁴⁹ the most practical indicator of increased risk of premature morbidity and mortality, or of re-admission to hospital, is the presence of two or more of the following:

- age ≥ 65 years
- NYHA Class III or IV symptoms
- Charlson Index of Comorbidity Score of 2 or more⁵⁰
- left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF) $\leq 30\%$
- living alone or remote from specialist cardiac services
- depression
- language barrier (e.g. non-English speaking)
- lower socio-economic status (due to poorer compliance, reduced understanding of reasons for medication, fewer visits to medical practitioners, high-salt diet in 'take-away foods', reduced ability to afford medications, higher rates of cigarette smoking, etc.)
- significant renal dysfunction (glomerular filtration rate < 60 mL/min/1.73 m²).

While high-risk patients benefit most from appropriate and consistent treatment, they are, unfortunately, often subjected to sub-optimal management. Their inability to tolerate even minor fluctuations in cardiac and renal function leaves them vulnerable to frequent and recurrent episodes of acute heart failure.

It is now recognised that up to two-thirds of CHF-related hospitalisations are preventable.⁵¹ The following modifiable factors are most commonly associated with poor health outcomes, particularly in high-risk patients:

- inadequate/inappropriate medical or surgical treatment
- adverse effects of prescribed therapy
- inadequate knowledge of the underlying illness and prescribed therapy
- inadequate response to, or recognition of, acute episodes of clinical deterioration
- non-adherence to prescribed pharmacological treatment

- lack of motivation/inability to adhere to a non-pharmacological therapy
- problems with caregivers or extended care facilities
- inadequate social support.

The positive effects of specialised management programs on survival (see below) suggests that these factors also result in a significant number of preventable deaths. Many of the factors listed above are often addressed in the 'usual care' arms of clinical trials, with the provision of increased monitoring and individualised follow-up. It is not surprising, therefore, that patients in clinical trials usually have lower than anticipated morbidity and mortality rates.

6.2 Physical activity and rehabilitation

Regular physical activity is now strongly recommended for patients with CHF on the following basis:

- patients may develop physical deconditioning, and regular physical activity can reduce this⁵²⁻⁵⁵
- patients have reduced physical activity capacity due to multiple factors, including inadequate blood flow to active skeletal muscles,⁵⁶⁻⁵⁸ inability to increase cardiac output in response to physical activity,⁵⁷ and physical activity-related mitral regurgitation⁵⁹
- when medically stable, all patients should be considered for referral to a specifically designed physical activity program;⁶⁰⁻⁶⁷ if such a program is unavailable, patients may undertake a modified cardiac rehabilitation program
- if patient comorbidities prevent participation in a structured or rehabilitation program, clinically stable patients should be encouraged to keep as active as possible
- physical activity has been shown to improve functional capacity, symptoms and neurohormonal abnormalities.⁵³

Physical activity should be tailored to the individual patient's capacity⁶⁰⁻⁶⁸ and may include walking, exercise bicycling, light weightlifting and stretching exercises. Patients should also walk daily at home for 10–30 minutes/day, five to seven days a week. They should not exercise to a level preventing normal conversation.⁶⁰⁻⁶⁸

Patients should be educated to achieve realistic and sustainable levels of physical activity. Elderly patients should not be excluded, as they have also been shown to benefit.⁶⁰⁻⁶⁸

The functional ability of patients varies greatly, and is poorly correlated with the resting ejection fraction, necessitating modulation of the recommended dose as follows.

- NYHA Functional Class I or II symptoms (see **Table 4.1**) — these people should progress gradually to at least 30 minutes of physical activity (continuously or in 10-minute bouts) of up to moderate intensity on most, if not all, days of the week.
- NYHA Functional Class III or IV symptoms — Class III requires short intervals of low-intensity activity, with frequent rest days; Class IV requires gentle mobilisation as symptoms allow.
- Regular physical activity for people with symptomatic CHF is best initiated under the supervision of a trained physical activity professional, who provides direction according to clinical status at all stages of the process, and who increases supervision as functional class deteriorates.
- Deterioration in a patient's clinical status may necessitate a reduction in the dose of physical activity until clinical stability is achieved.
- Isometric physical activity with heavy straining should be avoided, as it may increase LV afterload.⁶⁹ Isokinetic muscle-strengthening physical activity has been used safely in patients with CHF.⁶⁹
- Patients with angina pectoris should be encouraged to exercise below the anginal threshold.^{52-55,60-69}
- Patients should be encouraged to continue to be physically active in the long term, and only to refrain from physical activity during acute deterioration in CHF status.⁶⁰⁻⁶⁸
- Meta-analyses of randomised trials have shown that physical activity leads to overall reduction in mortality, an increase in combined survival and hospital-free periods, and reduction in hospitalisation.⁵⁶

Practice point

Non-pharmacological management may be as important as prescribing appropriate medications. Patients with CHF may develop physical deconditioning. Therefore, regular physical activity is recommended using a rehabilitation program tailored to suit the individual. Other measures are listed in **Table 6.1**.

When to rest

Patients who have an acute exacerbation of CHF, or whose condition is unstable, should have a brief period of bed rest until they improve. Strict bed rest may improve diuresis and cardiac function.⁷⁰ Adequate sleep is advisable for all.⁷⁰

Sexual function

There is little evidence regarding the effects of sexual activity in patients with CHF. In patients with pre-existing arrhythmia, sexual activity may be associated with worsening, but this is probably rare. Sexual activity is likely to be safe in patients who are able to achieve approximately six metabolic equivalents of exercise — that is, able to climb two flights of stairs without stopping due to angina, dyspnoea or dizziness.⁷¹

Male patients frequently suffer from erectile dysfunction.⁷²⁻⁷⁴ Sildenafil is contraindicated in patients receiving nitrate therapy, or those who have hypotension, arrhythmias or angina pectoris.⁷⁵ Studies examining the safety of sildenafil and other phosphodiesterase V receptor antagonists in patients with LV dysfunction are in progress. Until the results are known, caution should be exercised in prescribing sildenafil. Intracavernosal injections and intrameatal gel treatment are not recommended, as there is little evidence regarding their use.^{71,76}

6.3 Nutrition

Overweight

Patients who are overweight place increased demands upon the heart, both during physical activity and daily living. Weight loss may improve physical activity tolerance and quality of life and is recommended in all patients who exceed the healthy weight range.

Saturated fat

Saturated fat intake should be limited in all patients, but especially in those who suffer from CHD.⁷⁷

Fibre

Due to relative gastrointestinal hypoperfusion, constipation is common and a high-fibre diet is recommended.⁷⁷ This will avoid straining at stool, a situation that may provoke angina, dyspnoea or arrhythmia. In patients with severe CHF, frequent small meals may avoid shunting of the cardiac output to the gastrointestinal tract, thus reducing the risk of angina, dizziness, dyspnoea or bloating.⁷⁷

Undernutrition

Malnutrition, cardiac cachexia⁷⁸ and anaemia⁷⁹ are common problems that contribute to debilitating weakness and fatigue. They are also associated with a much poorer prognosis. Patients with these problems should be investigated to determine the underlying cause (e.g. intestinal malabsorption due to chronic



ischaemia, hepatomegaly or iron deficiency), and referred to a qualified dietitian for nutritional support.

Sodium

Excessive dietary sodium intake contributes to fluid overload and is a major cause of preventable hospitalisation.⁵¹ Reduced dietary sodium intake can result in beneficial haemodynamic and clinical effects — particularly when combined with a diuretic regimen. Unfortunately, there are few clinical data to guide clinicians. For patients with mild symptoms (i.e. clinically stable, NYHA Class II and no peripheral oedema), it is suggested that limiting sodium intake to 3 g per day is sufficient to control extracellular fluid volume. For patients with moderate to severe symptoms (NYHA Class III/IV) requiring a diuretic regimen, a restricted intake of 2 g per day should be applied.⁸⁰

Referral to a dietitian

To ensure that sodium restriction is optimised, the following steps should be undertaken (usually as part of a dietitian-led management program):

- assess the patient's knowledge of the critical importance of sodium and current dietary intake level
- educate the patient and family to identify and measure sodium intake
- monitor adherence to the prescribed sodium restriction, and reapply education/motivation techniques as required.

6.4 Fluid management

A key component of symptom monitoring and control for many patients is careful fluid management. Wherever possible, determine the patient's ideal 'dry' or 'euvolaemic' weight (i.e. weight at which a patient, who has been fluid overloaded and treated with a diuretic, reaches a steady weight with no remaining signs of overload). Using this ideal weight as a goal, encourage patients to keep a weight diary.

The principles of effective fluid management include the following.

- Patients should weigh themselves every morning after going to the toilet and before getting dressed or eating breakfast.
- Patients should be instructed that a steady weight gain over a number of days might indicate that they are retaining too much fluid. If this gain in weight is more than 2 kg (4 lb) over two days, they should contact their physician/specialist or heart failure nurse without delay.² Conversely, patients who lose a similar amount of weight over the same period should also contact their nurse/physician in case they have become dehydrated due to over-diuresis.

- Patients should understand that an intake of more than 2.0 L fluid per day should be avoided. It is important for them to know how much their usual cup, mug or glass holds and to keep a record of fluid intake until they become accustomed to how much they are allowed.
- During episodes of fluid retention, patients should be encouraged to reduce fluid intake to 1.5 L per day.
- If patients can self-care, they may regulate their diuretic dose based on daily weight monitoring and awareness of heart failure symptoms. Usually, a dose adjustment should be only a single multiple of the preceding dose (e.g. if the patient is taking 40 mg of frusemide once daily, the dose may be increased to 80 mg once daily). Initially, the increased dose should be maintained for three days only. If a dry weight is reached or symptoms resolve, the patient can revert to the original lower diuretic dose.⁸⁰
- Fluid restrictions may be liberalised in warmer weather. Asymptomatic patients who have noticed a significant drop in their weight (more than 2 kg over two days) may reduce their diuretic dose to maintain their appropriate dry weight and avoid renal dysfunction.

Alcohol

Patients who suffer from alcohol-related cardiomyopathy should abstain from alcohol with a view to slowing progression of the disease, or even improving LV function. In other patients, alcohol intake should not exceed 10–20 g (one to two standard drinks) a day. Whether light to moderate alcohol intake may improve prognosis in patients with LV dysfunction is controversial.

Alcohol is a direct myocardial toxin and may impair cardiac contractility.^{77,81} It also contributes to fluid intake, may increase body weight due to its caloric load^{77,81} and may alter metabolism of some medications used in heart failure. Therefore, caution should be exercised, particularly in patients with hepatic dysfunction. People who have a history of heavy alcohol intake and poor nutrition may benefit from vitamin supplementation, particularly thiamine.

Caffeine

Excessive caffeine intake may exacerbate arrhythmia, increase heart rate and increase blood pressure. Caffeine beverages also contribute to fluid intake and may alter plasma electrolyte levels in patients taking diuretics. Patients should be limited to 1–2 cups of caffeinated beverages a day.⁸²

6.5 Smoking

Patients should not smoke or chew tobacco. Smoking is atherogenic, reduces the oxygen content of blood, provokes vasoconstriction, impairs endothelial and respiratory function⁷⁷ and is arrhythmogenic. Smokers may employ nicotine replacement or other smoking-cessation strategies.

6.6 Self-management and education

Society faces an epidemic of CHF. Education and promotion of effective self-care, combined with optimal medical management, are critical for improved outcomes. Components of self-care should include:

- developing a good overall understanding of the pathology and treatment
- adhering to prescribed pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments
- monitoring their condition and adjusting treatment accordingly
- seeking healthcare when signs and symptoms worsen.

Patients should be educated about:

- their underlying condition
- beneficial lifestyle changes
- function of their medication
- possible side effects of therapy
- signs of deterioration in their condition
- importance of adherence to therapy.

An understanding of the condition by both patients and carers may reduce the possibility of non-adherence to diet, fluid restriction or medication, and allow early detection of change in clinical status.^{83–90} Good, consistent relationships with patients, coupled with an active role for patients and families, is essential. Multi-media resources are useful in patient education (written information, and audio or visual educational material).

6.7 Psychosocial support

There is strong and consistent evidence of an independent causal association between depression, social isolation and lack of quality social support and CHD.⁹¹ An LVEF of <20% predicts major depression, which in turn predicts increased mortality.⁹² In addition, the severity of depressed mood correlates with both impaired functional capacity and CHF symptoms, even though there may be no relationship between the latter two factors.⁹³ This suggests that the degree of depressed mood has contributions from different sources.

In a randomised controlled trial, cognitive behavioural therapy has been shown to reduce depression in cardiac patients.⁹⁴ Trials using cognitive behaviour therapy⁹⁵ or antidepressant medication⁹⁶ in depressed cardiac patients — both with and without impaired LV function — have demonstrated reduction of depression, but not significant reduction of mortality, in treatment compared with the control groups.

6.8 Other important issues

Sleep apnoea

Two varieties of sleep apnoea occur commonly in patients. Obstructive sleep apnoea occurs due to upper airway collapse and is likely to aggravate but not necessarily cause CHF. There is a strong relationship between obesity and obstructive sleep apnoea, both conditions being common in patients with CHF, and obesity may increase the risk of developing CHF.^{97,98} Compared to those without obstructive sleep apnoea, adults with the condition have been shown to have a reduced LVEF, lower LV emptying and filling rates, and a higher incidence of CHF.^{97,98}

Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) treatment has been shown in some studies to improve LV filling and emptying rates,⁹⁷ and to improve the LVEF.^{97,98} A randomised controlled study in obstructive sleep apnoea patients with systolic LV dysfunction and heart failure has shown CPAP treatment to lead to a significant improvement in LVEF, a fall in systolic blood pressure and a reduction in LV chamber size.⁹⁹ Besides being effective treatments for obstructive sleep apnoea, weight reduction and CPAP are also likely to augment cardiac function; CPAP may do this via intrathoracic pressure effects on the heart and alveoli.¹⁰⁰

By contrast, central sleep apnoea (also known as Cheyne–Stokes respiration) can occur both independently and as a result of high sympathetic activation and pulmonary congestion due to severe CHF. Central sleep apnoea may occur in up to 20–30% of patients and is associated with a higher overall mortality.^{100,101} These patients characteristically have elevated pulmonary capillary wedge pressure, lower LVEF and higher plasma noradrenaline levels. Central sleep apnoea can be induced in patients by reduction in PaCO₂ from eupnoeic to an apnoeic level.¹⁰² On heart rate variability testing, CHF patients with central sleep apnoea have impaired autonomic control, with increased sympathetic tone and reduced vagal tone.^{103,104}

Central sleep apnoea is best managed by optimising medical treatment. If it persists, a therapeutic trial of CPAP should be considered. CPAP reduces transmural pressure gradient, cardiac work, sympathetic activity, LV dimensions and the work of breathing as well as increasing end-expiratory lung volume and overcoming ‘cardiac asthma’ via bronchodilatation.^{105,106}



The role of supplemental oxygen in the treatment of patients with CHF and central sleep apnoea is not proven. Although oxygen therapy may reduce cardiac output and increase pulmonary capillary wedge pressure,¹⁰⁷ it may also directly reduce the severity of central sleep apnoea by increasing PaCO₂ (Haldane effect) and blunting chemoreceptors. However, this has not been demonstrated to augment cardiac function.¹⁰⁷ Oxygen therapy is not recommended in central sleep apnoea but may be tried for palliative purposes if no other treatment is successful. The response is variable.

If sleep apnoea is suspected, referral to a sleep physician is indicated.

Practice point

If sleep apnoea is suspected, referral to a sleep physician is indicated.

Vaccination

Patients are at increased risk of respiratory infection and should be vaccinated against influenza and pneumococcal disease, as respiratory infections are a major reason for acute decompensation, especially in the elderly.^{77,81}

Pregnancy and contraception

Women considering pregnancy should be made aware that:

- CHF greatly increases the risk of maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality
- pregnancy and delivery may cause deterioration in women with moderate to severe CHF — pregnancy in mild CHF may be considered for a fully informed patient and her partner
- many of the medications used in treatment are contraindicated in pregnancy
- low-dose oral contraceptive usage appears to bring a small risk of causing hypertension or thrombogenicity,⁸¹ but these risks need to be weighed against those associated with pregnancy.

Travel

Patients may be at increased risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and should discuss travel plans with their doctors. Short-distance air travel appears to be of low risk in mild cases. Long flights may predispose to accidental omission of medications, lower limb oedema, dehydration and DVT, but are not necessarily contraindicated.⁸¹

High-altitude destinations should be avoided because of relative hypoxia. Travellers to very humid or hot climates should be counselled on dehydration and modification of diuretic doses. If long flights are planned, DVT prophylaxis with a single injection of low molecular weight heparin and/or graduated compression stockings plus calf stretching during the flight should be considered; pharmacological therapy may be added if the risk of DVT is significant.

Recommendations relating to the non-pharmacological management are shown in [Table 6.1](#).

Table 6.1**Recommendations for non-pharmacological management of CHF**

	Grade of recommendation*
Regular physical activity is recommended. ⁵² All patients should be referred to a specially designed physical activity program, if available. ⁵³⁻⁵⁵	B
Patient support by a doctor and pre-discharge review and/or home visit by a nurse is recommended to prevent clinical deterioration. ^{83,84}	A
Patients frequently have coexisting sleep apnoea and, if suspected, patients should be referred to a sleep clinician as they may benefit from nasal CPAP. ¹⁰¹	D
Patients who have an acute exacerbation, or are clinically unstable, should undergo a period of bed rest until their condition improves. ⁷⁰	D
Dietary sodium should be limited to below 2 g/day. ⁸⁴	C
Fluid intake should generally be limited to 1.5 L/day with mild to moderate symptoms, and 1 L/day in severe cases, especially if there is coexistent hyponatraemia. ⁸⁵	C
Alcohol intake should preferably be nil, but should not exceed 10–20 g a day (one to two standard drinks). ⁸⁵	D
Smoking should be strongly discouraged.	D
Patients should be advised to weigh themselves daily and to consult their doctor if weight increases by more than 2 kg in a two-day period, or if they experience dyspnoea, oedema or abdominal bloating.	D
Patients should be vaccinated against influenza and pneumococcal disease.	B
High-altitude destinations should be avoided. Travel to very humid or hot climates should be undertaken with caution, and fluid status should be carefully monitored.	C
Sildenafil and other phosphodiesterase V inhibitors are generally safe in patients with heart failure. However, these medications are contraindicated in patients receiving nitrate therapy, or those who have hypotension, arrhythmias or angina pectoris. ⁷⁵	C
Obese patients should be advised to lose weight.	D
A diet with reduced saturated fat intake and a high fibre intake is encouraged in patients with CHF.	D
No more than two cups of caffeinated beverages per day recommended.	D
Pregnancy should be avoided in patients with CHF.	D

*These grades of recommendation apply only to patients with CHF

7

Pharmacological therapy

7.1 Prevention of CHF and treatment of asymptomatic LV systolic dysfunction

ACEIs

ACEIs have been shown to delay development of symptomatic CHF in patients with asymptomatic LV dysfunction, as well as those without known ventricular dysfunction.^{108,109}

Administration of ramipril (10 mg daily) has been shown to reduce the risk of developing CHF, compared with placebo, in patients at high risk of cardiovascular disease but without known LV dysfunction.¹¹⁰ Perindopril has been shown to reduce admissions to hospital with heart failure when given to patients with coronary artery disease but without known CHF at the outset.¹¹¹

In a study of patients with asymptomatic LV dysfunction (LVEF <40%), treatment with enalapril (10 mg twice daily) prevented development of symptomatic CHF¹⁰⁹ and lowered the risk of both hospitalisation for, and death from, CHF. These data are complemented by results from a number of studies of ACEIs in the immediate post-MI period.

Beta-blockers

When given in the early post-MI period, beta-blockers reduce the subsequent development of CHF in patients with preserved ventricular function, and also the progression of the condition in patients with impaired ventricular function.^{112,113}

In a large prospective study of patients with both symptomatic and asymptomatic LV dysfunction, the use of beta-blockers, in addition to standard management during the post-MI period, showed that the frequency of all-cause and cardiovascular mortality and recurrent non-fatal MI was reduced with carvedilol compared with placebo. This supports the use of beta-blockers in this setting.¹¹⁴

Limited data exist on the use of beta-blockers to prevent progression to symptomatic CHF in patients with asymptomatic LV dysfunction not associated with MI. In a trial involving patients with mild CHF, a subset (30%), who were asymptomatic at the time of randomisation to carvedilol or placebo,¹¹⁵ showed a relative reduction in risk of death and all-cause hospitalisation similar to that observed in symptomatic patients with no other cause of LV dysfunction. However, this finding was not statistically significant.

Other agents

Hypertension is a major risk factor for the subsequent development of CHF. It has been clearly demonstrated through a number of major trials that lowering blood pressure reduces the incidence of CHF dramatically.¹¹⁶⁻¹¹⁸ There are no clear-cut data to suggest that newer agents, such as ACEIs or calcium-channel blockers, achieve this to a greater extent than older agents, such as diuretics and beta-blockers.¹¹⁹⁻¹²⁴

Table 7.1

Therapies for other cardiovascular conditions shown to reduce CHF incidence

Study	Inclusion criteria	Therapy
SOLVD prevention, 1992 ¹²⁵	Asymptomatic, LVEF <35%	Enalapril
2003 review of 29 randomised trials ^{124,126}	Hypertension	Beta-blockers and diuretics, ACEIs, angiotensin II receptor antagonists
Landmark statin trials ¹²⁷ 4S, 2004 HPS, 2002 TNT, 2005	CHD	Statin
VAHIT, 1999 ¹²⁸	CHD	Gemfibrozil
HOPE, 2000 ¹²⁹	Vascular disease or diabetes and another risk factor	Ramipril
PROGRESS, 2003 ¹³⁰	Cerebrovascular disease	Perindopril (in combination with indapamide)
EUROPA, 2003 ¹¹¹	CHD	Perindopril

Table 7.2

Recommendations for preventing CHF and treating asymptomatic LV dysfunction

	Grade of recommendation
All patients with asymptomatic systolic LV dysfunction should be treated with an ACEI indefinitely, unless intolerant. ^{108,109}	A
Anti-hypertensive therapy should be used to prevent subsequent CHF in patients with elevated blood pressure. ¹¹⁶⁻¹²¹	A
Preventive treatment with an ACEI may be considered in individual patients at high risk of ventricular dysfunction. ¹¹⁰	B
Beta-blockers should be commenced early after an MI, whether or not the patient has systolic ventricular dysfunction. ^{117,118}	B
Statin therapy should be used as part of a risk management strategy to prevent ischaemic events and subsequent CHF in patients who fulfil criteria for lipid-lowering. ¹³¹	B



7.2 Treatment of symptomatic systolic heart failure

Many drug groups have been trialled in the treatment of patients with symptomatic CHF. Data supporting the use of these agents in systolic heart failure are described below, with recommendations summarised in [Table 7.3](#).

A rational approach to the introduction of these agents is described in [Figures 7.2](#) to [7.5](#).

ACEIs

Because of the major importance of activation of the renin–angiotensin–aldosterone system in progression of CHF, its blockade has become one of the cornerstones of successful therapy for systolic ventricular dysfunction. ACEIs have been shown to:

- prolong survival in patients with NYHA Class II, III and IV symptoms, compared to placebo^{132,133}
- improve symptom status, physical activity tolerance and need for hospitalisation in patients with worsening CHF¹³⁴ (in some but not all studies)
- increase ejection fraction compared to placebo in many studies.¹³²

The optimal dose of ACEI has not been determined. One study showed no difference in the combined endpoint of worsening of symptoms, hospitalisation and mortality with three different doses of enalapril.¹³⁵ Another found a non-significant reduction in mortality and a significant but small reduction in the combined endpoint of death and all-cause hospitalisation¹³⁶ with higher doses of lisinopril. Therefore, all patients should be started on a low dose of ACEI, and every effort made to increase to doses shown to be of benefit in major trials. However, this should not be done at the expense of the introduction, where appropriate, of beta-blockers.

Practice point

All patients with systolic LV dysfunction, whether symptomatic or asymptomatic, should be commenced on ACE inhibitors with every effort made to up-titrate to the dose shown to be of benefit in major trials. Other recommended medications are listed in [Table 7.3](#).

Beta-blockers

As with ACEIs, beta-blockers inhibit the adverse effects of chronic activation of a key neurohormonal system (the sympathetic nervous system) acting on the myocardium. The adverse effects of sympathetic activation are mediated via beta-1 receptors, beta-2 receptors and/or alpha-1 receptors.

Three beta-blockers — carvedilol (beta-1, beta-2 and alpha-1 antagonist),¹³⁷ bisoprolol (beta-1 selective antagonist) and metoprolol extended release (beta-1 selective antagonist)¹³⁸ — prolong survival in patients with mild to moderate CHF already receiving an ACEI. This survival benefit includes both reductions in sudden death, as well as death due to progressive pump failure.

A recent study¹³⁹ demonstrated that carvedilol (25 mg bd) was superior to immediate-release metoprolol (50 mg bd) in prolonging survival in patients with mild to moderate symptoms. It is not clear whether these differences relate to the doses¹⁴⁰ used, or the pharmacological effects of carvedilol beyond blockade of the beta-1 adrenoceptor. This study highlights the importance of aiming to achieve the target doses of beta-blockers as used in the major successful trials. Carvedilol has also been shown to prolong survival in patients with severe symptoms¹⁴¹ who did not have overt volume overload or recent acute decompensation.

Symptomatic benefits are also observed with beta-blockers, particularly in patients with advanced disease.^{137,138,140}

Beta-blockers should not be initiated during a phase of acute decompensation, but only after the patient's condition has stabilised. Adverse effects of beta-blockade in this setting include symptomatic hypotension, worsening of symptoms due to withdrawal of sympathetic drive and bradycardia. However, side effects are often transitory and do not usually necessitate cessation of the drug. Beginning at low doses with gradual increases limits these adverse effects.

A recent study has suggested that major clinical outcomes are similar whether a beta-blocker is started first followed by ACE inhibitor, or the opposite (conventional) order is followed.¹⁴² Therefore, the order of commencing these life-saving heart failure drugs may be left to the individual prescribing physician, dependent on clinical circumstances.

Diuretics

Chronic diuretic therapy has not been shown to improve survival and should be reserved for symptom control only. Combination therapy of an ACEI and a diuretic is usually necessary, as an ACEI is often unlikely to provide adequate relief from congestive symptoms.

Diuretics have been shown to increase urine sodium excretion and decrease the physical signs of fluid retention, thereby rapidly improving symptom status.

In fluid-overloaded patients, the aim is to achieve an increase in urine output and weight reduction of 0.5–1 kg daily — usually with a loop diuretic — until clinical euvolaemia is achieved. At this point, the diuretic dose should be decreased, if possible. The dose should be regularly reassessed, as it may need to be adjusted according to volume status. Patients should also be monitored for hypokalaemia during treatment with a loop diuretic. Loop and thiazide diuretics are often given together in clinical practice, although objective data supporting this combination are limited.

Aldosterone antagonists

Aldosterone receptors within the heart can mediate fibrosis, hypertrophy and arrhythmogenesis. Therefore, blockade of these receptors with agents such as spironolactone, which is traditionally considered a potassium-sparing loop diuretic, may provide benefit. Spironolactone has a number of other properties that make it an important agent in treatment.

This hypothesis is supported by the observed reduction in all-cause mortality and symptomatic improvement in patients with advanced CHF receiving spironolactone (average dose 25 mg per day) compared with placebo.¹⁴³

The risk of hyperkalaemia — which is potentially lethal, particularly in the presence of ACEI and/or renal impairment — requires vigilance when using spironolactone. The latter is also an androgen receptor antagonist and may cause feminisation side effects, such as gynaecomastia.

A ‘selective’ aldosterone antagonist without anti-androgenic effects, eplerenone, has been found to reduce mortality (and hospitalisation) in the immediate (3–14 days) post-MI period in patients with LV systolic dysfunction and symptoms of heart failure.¹⁴⁴ This benefit appeared to be additive to those of ACEIs and beta-blockers. Eplerenone is now registered in Australia for this indication.

Digoxin

The cardiac glycoside, digoxin, inhibits sodium–potassium ATPase. Blockade of this enzyme has been associated with improved inotropic responsiveness in patients with ventricular dysfunction. Digoxin may also sensitise cardiopulmonary baroreceptors, reduce central sympathetic outflow, increase vagal activity and reduce renin secretion.

A number of studies in patients in sinus rhythm support the favourable effect of digoxin on symptoms and LVEF. Withdrawal of digoxin in the presence of an ACEI leads to progressive deterioration in symptoms and physical activity tolerance.¹⁴⁵

In contrast, the only placebo-controlled trial of digoxin yielded a neutral outcome regarding mortality.¹⁴⁶ A reduction in deaths due to worsening CHF was offset by an increase in sudden death. However, there was a reduction in hospitalisation, and patients with more severe symptoms appeared to obtain symptomatic benefit from the introduction of digoxin. It is important

to note that this study was performed before routine use of ACEIs and beta-blockers.

Further analysis of these results suggests that a plasma level of digoxin between 0.4 and 0.8 mmol/L confers a survival advantage,¹⁴⁷ except in females, who showed increased mortality.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps this finding is related to a pharmacological interaction with hormone replacement therapy, suggesting caution with the use of digoxin in this subgroup. Digoxin remains a valuable therapy in CHF patients with concomitant atrial fibrillation.

Angiotensin II receptor antagonists

An overview of studies comparing the use of ACEIs and angiotensin II receptor antagonists in heart failure shows similar outcomes.^{149–151} In patients who are ACEI intolerant, angiotensin II receptor antagonists provide morbidity and mortality benefits in comparison to placebo. Therefore, angiotensin II receptor antagonists are recommended as an alternative for patients who experience ACEI-mediated adverse effects, such as a cough.^{152,153}

Angiotensin II receptor antagonists have been shown to provide additional morbidity and mortality benefits in patients receiving ACEIs for CHF,^{153,154} but not for heart failure after acute MI.¹⁵¹ The effect of angiotensin II receptor antagonists on mortality alone was not significant in individual trials. Earlier concerns regarding an adverse interaction between ACEIs, angiotensin II receptor antagonists and beta-blockers have been recently allayed. As with ACEIs, hyperkalaemia needs to be carefully monitored when using angiotensin II receptor antagonists.

Angiotensin II receptor antagonists are generally better tolerated than ACEIs due to the absence of kinin-mediated side effects, such as dry cough. On the other hand, inhibition of kinin breakdown by ACEIs may be an important beneficial effect of these agents (e.g. bradykinin-induced nitric oxide synthesis).

Other drugs

Hydralazine/isosorbide dinitrate

This combination of vasodilator drugs was shown to be marginally superior to placebo in relation to mortality,¹⁵⁵ but of no benefit with respect to rates of hospitalisation. The ACEI enalapril was shown to be clearly superior to hydralazine and isosorbide dinitrate in decreasing mortality by reducing the rate of sudden death.¹⁵⁶ A recent trial demonstrating a benefit for this combination in African-Americans is of limited applicability to the Australian context.¹⁵⁷

Calcium-channel blockers

Calcium-channel blockers have been studied in patients with LV dysfunction because of their vasodilator and anti-ischaemic effects.

Non-dihydropyridine calcium-channel blockers that are direct negative inotropes, such as verapamil and diltiazem, are contraindicated in patients with systolic heart failure; however, diltiazem is occasionally used



to reduce excessive exercise-related heart rates in patients with CHF and atrial fibrillation.

The dihydropyridine calcium-channel blockers, amlodipine and felodipine, have not shown survival benefits in patients with systolic CHF¹⁵⁸⁻¹⁶⁰ but, as outcomes were not adverse, may be used to treat comorbidities (such as hypertension and CHD) in these patients.

Use of alternative therapies

'Alternative' therapies such as co-enzyme Q10, L-carnitine, L-propionyl carnitine and creatine have been suggested to be of benefit in the management of systolic CHF. There have, however, been very few well-conducted studies of these agents; therefore, none can be recommended at this time.

Practice point

Drugs to avoid in CHF:

- anti-arrhythmic agents (apart from beta-blockers and amiodarone)
- non-dihydropyridine calcium-channel blockers (verapamil, diltiazem)
- tricyclic antidepressants
- non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and COX-2 inhibitors
- clozapine
- metformin and thiazolidinediones (pioglitazone, rosiglitazone)
- corticosteroids (glucocorticoids and mineralocorticoids)
- tumour necrosis factor antagonist biologicals.

Table 7.3
Recommendations for pharmacological treatment of symptomatic CHF

	Grade of recommendation
First-line agents	
ACEIs, unless not tolerated or contraindicated, are recommended for all patients with systolic heart failure (LVEF <40%), whether symptoms are mild, moderate or severe. ^{132,133}	A
Every effort should be made to increase doses of ACEIs to those shown to be of benefit in major trials. ^{135,136} If this is not possible, a lower dose of ACEI is preferable to none at all.	B
Diuretics should be used, if necessary, to achieve euvolaemia in fluid-overloaded patients. In patients with systolic LV dysfunction, diuretics should never be used as monotherapy, but should always be combined with an ACEI to maintain euvolaemia.	D
Beta-blockers are recommended, unless not tolerated or contraindicated, for all patients with systolic CHF who remain mildly to moderately symptomatic despite appropriate doses of an ACEI. ^{137,138,140,141}	A
Beta-blockers are also indicated for patients with symptoms of advanced CHF. ¹⁴¹	B
Aldosterone receptor blockade with spironolactone is recommended for patients who remain severely symptomatic, despite appropriate doses of ACEIs and diuretics. ¹⁴³	B
Eplerenone is recommended in the early post-MI period for patients with LV systolic dysfunction and symptoms of heart failure.	
Angiotensin II receptor antagonists may be used as an alternative in patients who do not tolerate ACEIs due to kinin-mediated adverse effects (e.g. cough). ¹⁵² They should also be considered for reducing morbidity and mortality in patients with systolic CHF who remain symptomatic despite receiving ACEIs.	A
Second-line agents	
Digoxin may be considered for symptom relief and to reduce hospitalisation in patients with advanced CHF. ¹⁴⁶ It remains a valuable therapy in CHF patients with atrial fibrillation.	B
Hydralazine-isosorbide dinitrate combination should be reserved for patients who are truly intolerant of ACEIs and angiotensin II receptor antagonists, or for whom these agents are contraindicated and no other therapeutic option exists. ¹⁵⁵	B
Other agents	
Amlodipine and felodipine can be used to treat comorbidities such as hypertension and CHD in patients with systolic CHF. They have been shown to neither increase nor decrease mortality. ¹⁵⁸⁻¹⁶⁰	B

Figure 7.1

Pharmacological treatment of asymptomatic LV dysfunction
(LVEF <40%) (NYHA Class I)

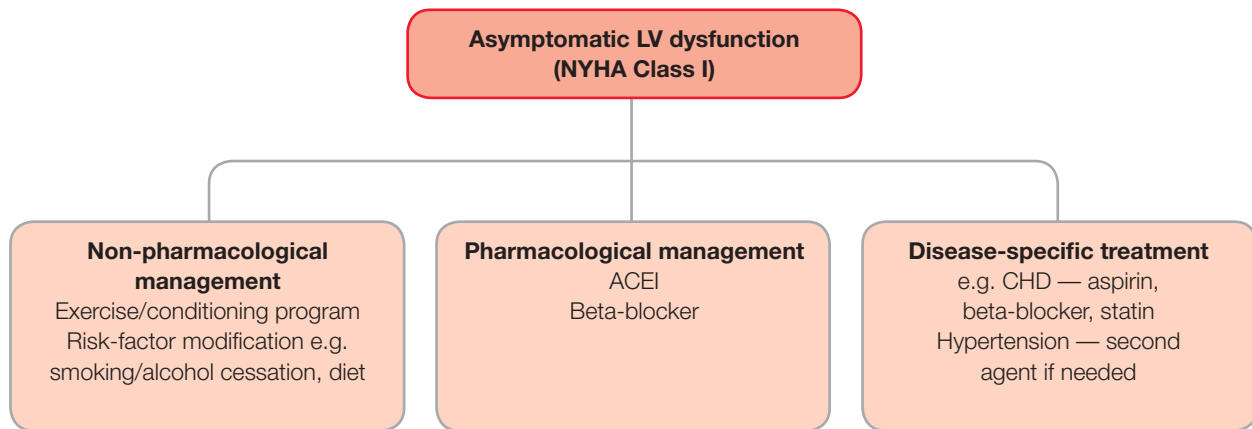
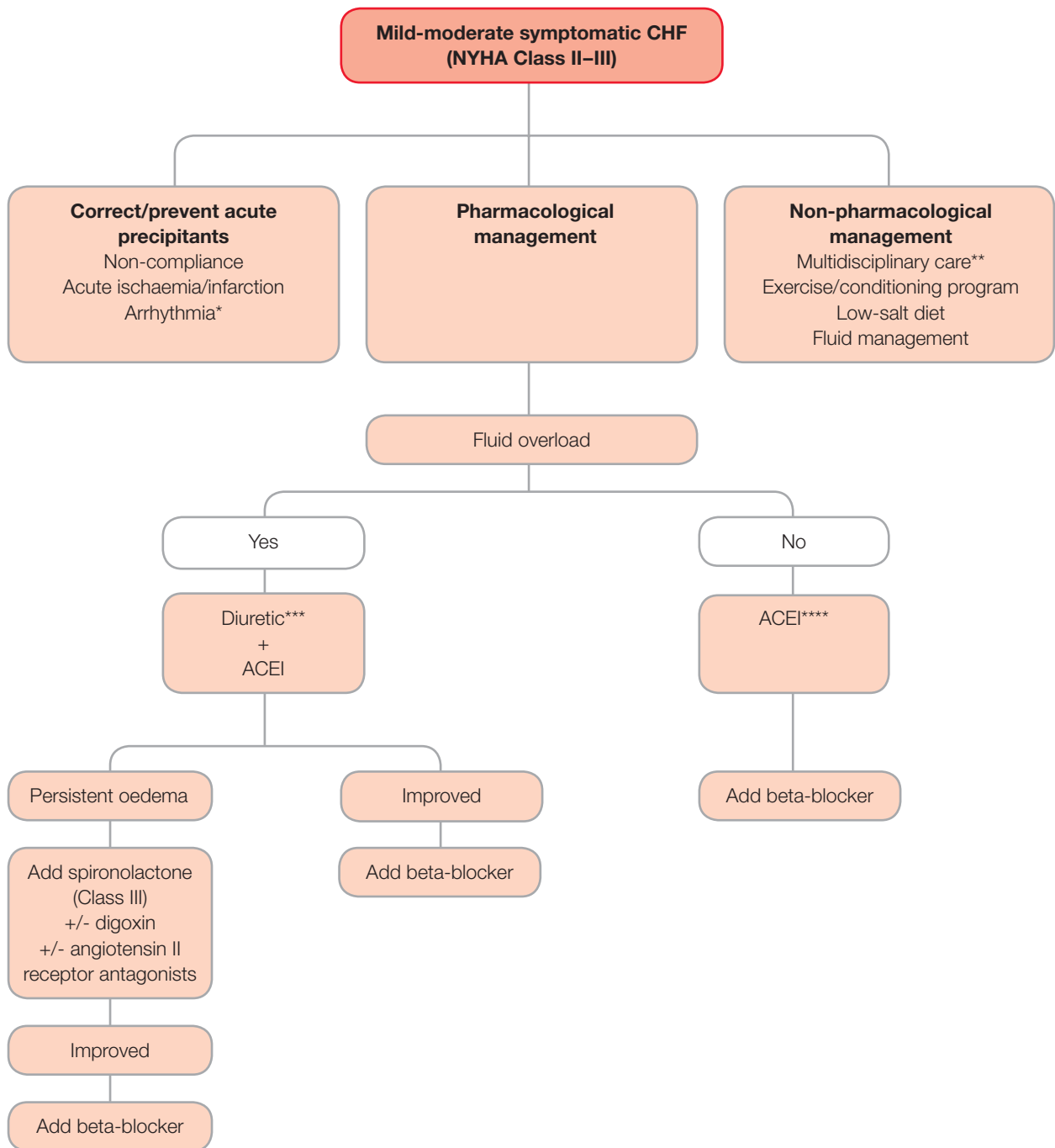


Figure 7.2

Pharmacological treatment of systolic heart failure
(LVEF <40%) (NYHA Class II–III)



* Patients in atrial fibrillation (AF) should be anticoagulated with a target INR of 2.0–3.0. Amiodarone may be used to control AF rate or attempt cardioversion. Electrical cardioversion may be considered after 4 weeks if still in AF. Digoxin will slow resting AF rate.

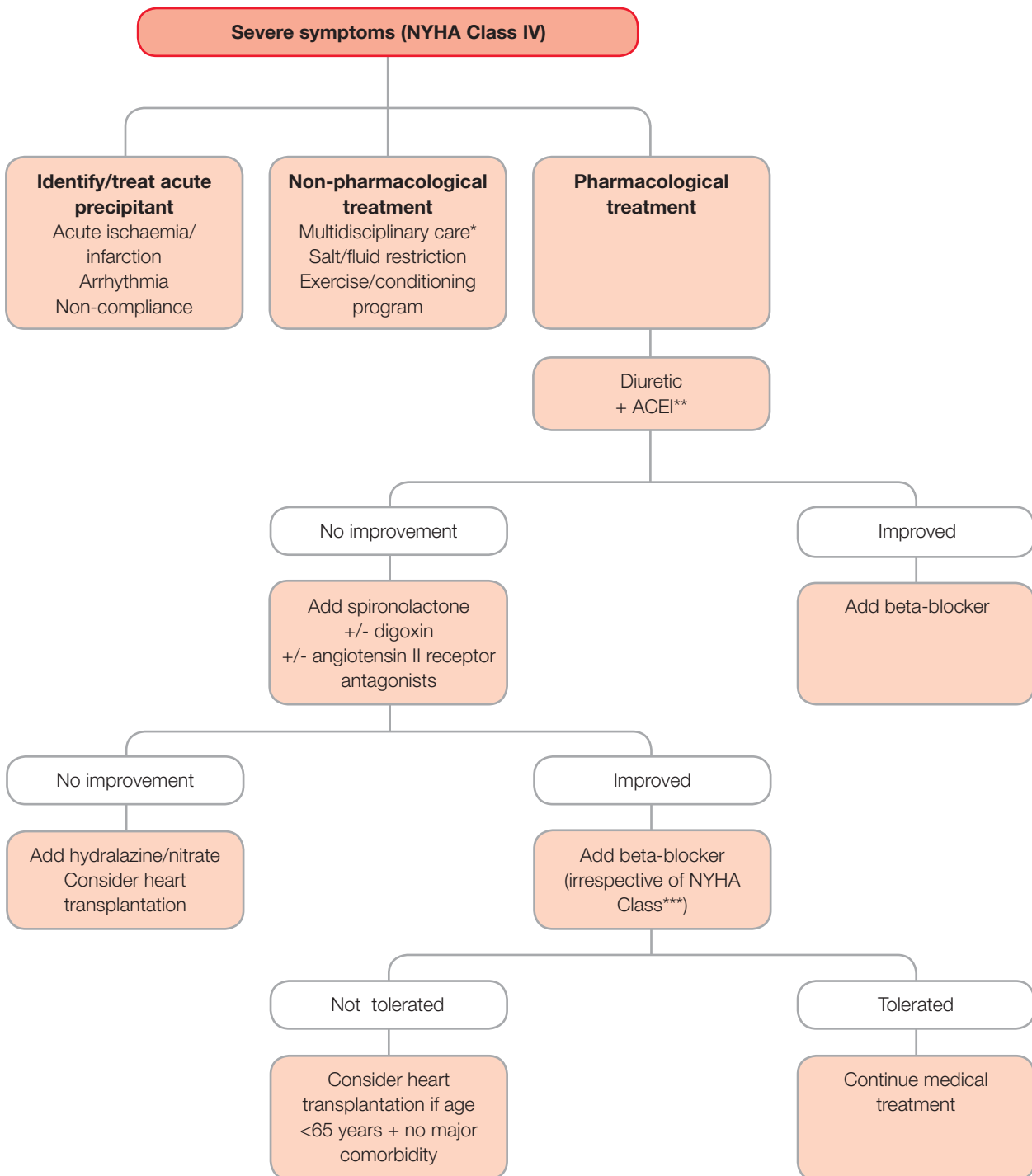
** Multidisciplinary care (pre-discharge and home review by a community care nurse, pharmacist and allied health personnel) with education regarding prognosis, compliance, exercise and rehabilitation, lifestyle modification, vaccinations and self-monitoring.

*** The most commonly prescribed first-choice diuretic is a loop diuretic e.g. frusemide; however there is no evidence that loop diuretics are more effective or safer than thiazides.

**** If ACEI intolerant, use angiotensin II receptor antagonists instead.


Figure 7.3

Pharmacological treatment of refractory systolic heart failure (LVEF <40%) (NYHA Class IV)



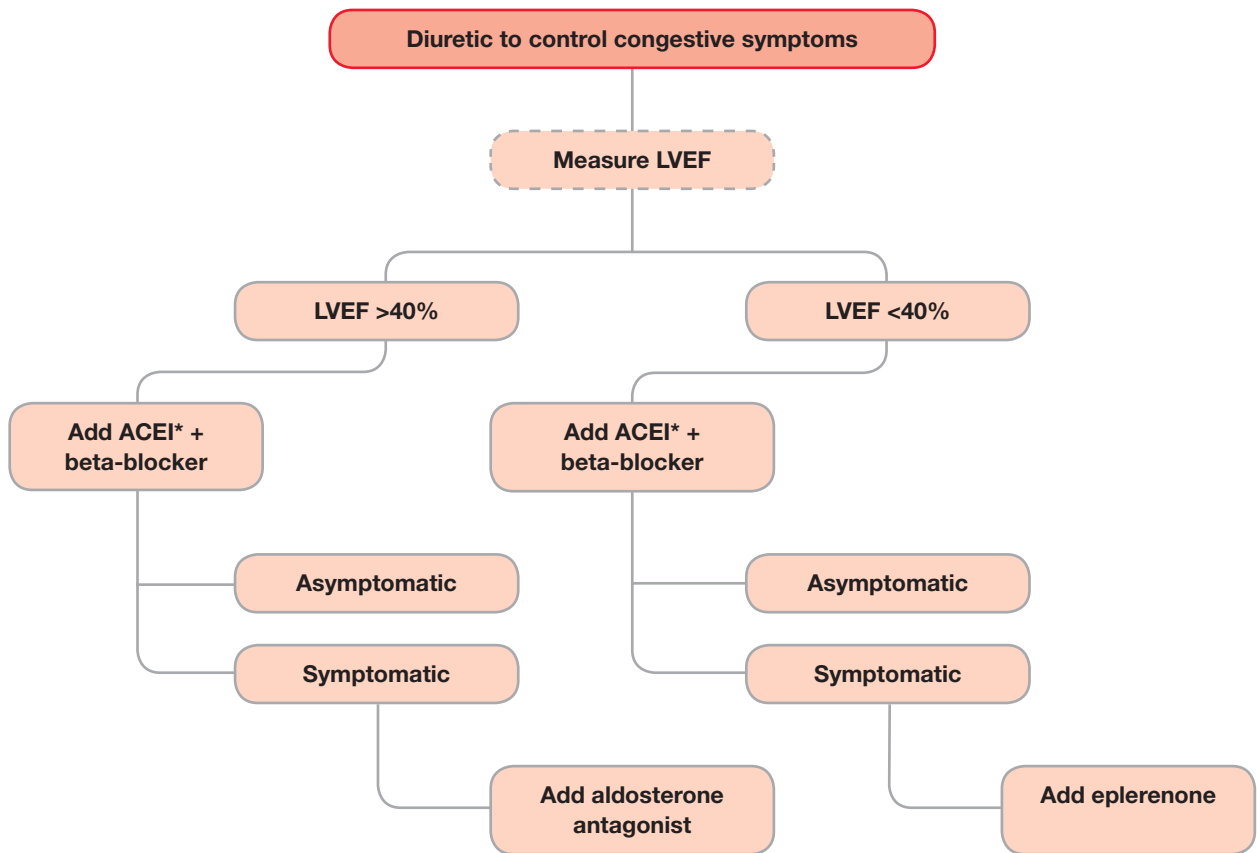
* Multidisciplinary care (pre-discharge and home review by a community care nurse, pharmacist and allied health personnel) with education regarding prognosis, compliance, exercise and rehabilitation, lifestyle modification, vaccinations and self-monitoring.

** If ACEI intolerant, use angiotensin II receptor antagonists instead.

*** Patients with NYHA Class IV CHF should be challenged with beta-blockers provided they have been rendered euvoalaemic and do not have any contraindication to beta-blockers.

Figure 7.4

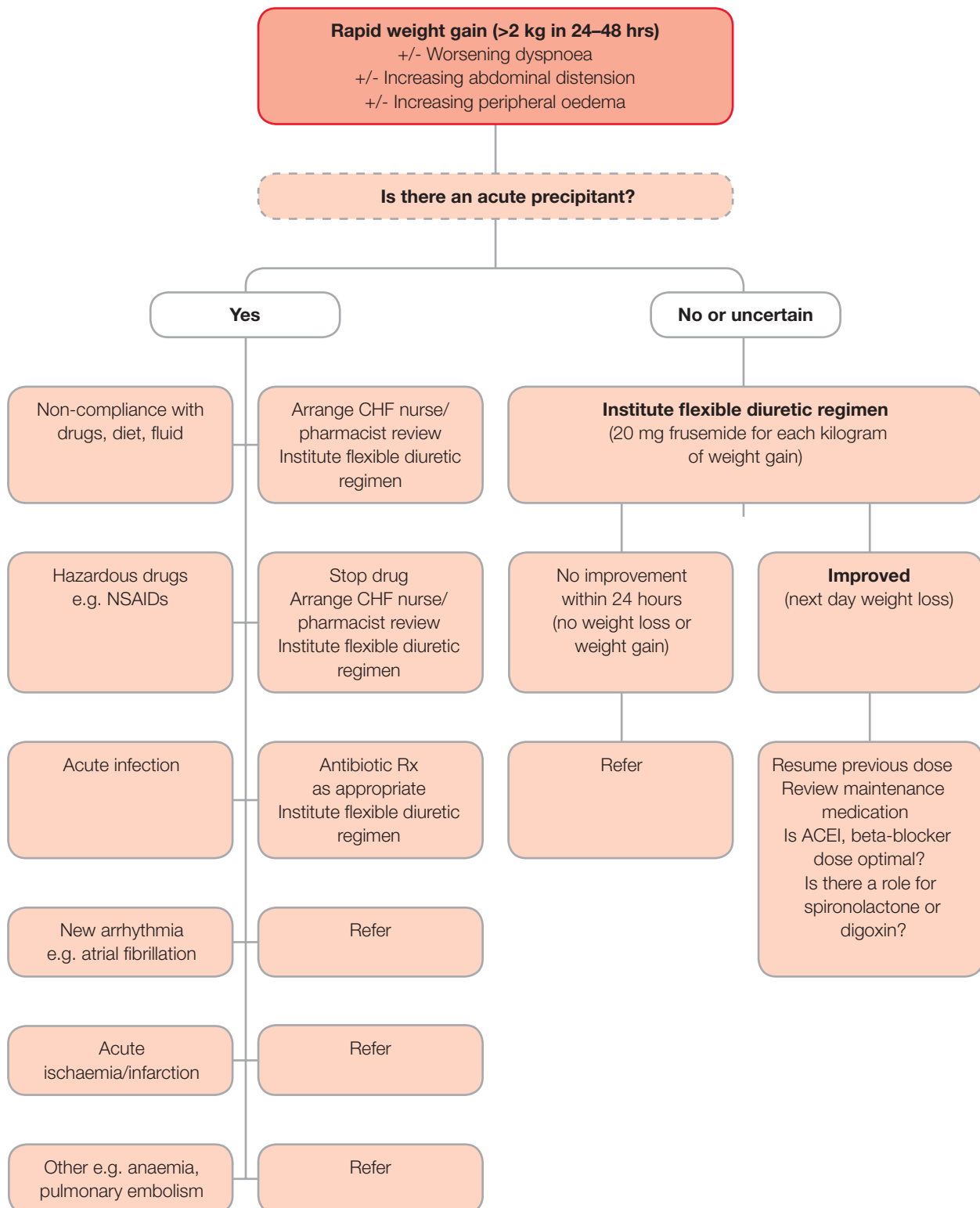
Pharmacological treatment of heart failure after recent or remote MI



* If ACEI intolerant, use angiotensin II receptor antagonists instead



Figure 7.5
Management of clinical deterioration in CHF



7.3 Outpatient treatment of advanced systolic heart failure

Positive inotropic agents

Inotropic therapy aims to improve pump function by acutely increasing contractility.¹⁶¹ Inotropic drugs are generally indicated for acute, short-term support of a patient with myocardial dysfunction, reduced stroke volume, cardiac output, blood pressure and peripheral perfusion with increased ventricular filling pressure.¹⁶² Inotropic drugs acutely improve stroke volume, cardiac output, filling pressures and systemic and pulmonary vascular resistance, leading to some symptomatic improvement.¹⁶³

Sustained inotropic stimulation can potentially increase myocardial oxygen demand in patients with myocardial ischaemia and possibly promote arrhythmia.¹⁶⁴ For this reason, inotropic therapy should be reserved for patients not responding to other treatments for short-term support, until they can recover from acute haemodynamic compromise.¹⁶⁵

Dobutamine is generally used as a positive inotropic drug with vasodilator activity, while dopamine is used as a vasopressor with positive inotropic effects when given in medium to high doses.¹⁶⁶ Milrinone is less frequently used in CHF because of concerns about arrhythmogenesis.¹⁶⁷ Levosimendan is a calcium-sensitising inotropic agent that does not increase intracellular calcium levels and has been shown to be superior to dobutamine in the treatment of advanced heart failure and does not antagonise the effects of beta-blockers.¹⁶⁸ Further studies are ongoing to establish the place of levosimendan in the management of decompensation.

Oral agents (excluding digoxin)

Despite favourable haemodynamic effects, long-term oral therapy with C'AMP-dependent positive inotropic agents (e.g. milrinone) has not been demonstrated to improve symptoms or clinical status reliably, and has been associated with a significant increase in mortality.^{169–171}

Intermittent intravenous infusions (outpatient)

Intermittent intravenous outpatient infusions of dobutamine (2–12 hours daily for 2–5 days a week) are associated with increased mortality (related to total dose given) and are not recommended. Data on the use of intermittent milrinone infusions are insufficient for recommendation at present.

3–5 day intravenous infusions (inpatient)

These have been found to be safe and are used to achieve haemodynamic optimisation in patients with severe CHF. This treatment may achieve clinical stability, thereby enabling introduction of agents such as beta-blockers.

Continuous ambulatory infusion (home)

Continuous ambulatory infusion of positive inotropes may have a role in improving quality of life in patients who cannot be weaned from inotropic support and would otherwise be unable to be discharged from hospital.¹⁷² This therapy can also be used as palliation or as a bridging strategy to transplantation.



8 Devices

8.1 Pacing

Pacing is often used to treat elderly patients with syncope due to suspected or proven bradycardia. Modes vary according to the chamber(s) stimulated: either or both ventricle(s) or atria.

Traditionally, pacing has been via an apical right ventricular (RV) transvenous pacing lead (VVI pacing). Where there is atrial activity on the surface ECG, synchronised atrial pacing is used to produce a physiological atrio-ventricular delay (DDD pacing). Recently, however, it has been realised that the greater the amount of RV pacing used, either of VVI or DDD mode, the higher the risk that the patient will develop CHF.^{173,174} Therefore, choice of pacing mode is critical, and constant RV pacing should be avoided if possible in patients with severe LV dysfunction because it may worsen heart failure. Where possible, atrial pacing (AAI) is preferable in patients with systolic heart failure. In patients who meet guideline criteria, biventricular pacing should be considered.

Practice point

Bradycardia is common in elderly patients with advanced heart disease treated with beta-blocker therapy.

8.2 Biventricular pacing

Patients with symptomatic dilated heart failure may have asynchronous contraction of the left ventricle, especially if QRS duration is prolonged (more than 150 ms). In these patients, systolic function is improved by pacing simultaneously in the left and right ventricles (termed cardiac-resynchronisation therapy or biventricular pacing). Biventricular pacing reduces symptoms and frequency of hospitalisation when carried out in patients with symptomatic dilated CHF and prolonged QRS duration.^{175–177} A recent study has also demonstrated a mortality benefit of biventricular pacing in patients with heart failure.

The CARE-HF trial randomised patients to receive medical therapy alone or with cardiac resynchronisation. Patients were included according to the following criteria: NYHA Class III or IV symptoms, despite receipt of standard pharmacological therapy;

LVEF of $\leq 35\%$; LV end-diastolic dimension of ≥ 30 mm (indexed to height); and QRS interval of at least 120 ms. Patients with a QRS interval of 120 to 149 ms were required to meet additional echocardiographic criteria for ventricular dyssynchrony. Patients receiving resynchronisation therapy demonstrated highly significant mortality reduction.¹⁷⁸ These data support the results of a prior meta-analysis¹⁷⁹ and individual trials¹⁷⁷ which had previously suggested a mortality benefit of biventricular pacing compared to standard medical treatment. Placement of the pacing electrode in the coronary vein overlying the left ventricle can be achieved in about 90% of patients with a hospital mortality of 0.5%.

Therefore, biventricular pacing is indicated in patients with:

- NYHA symptoms Class III–IV despite optimal medical therapy
- dilated heart failure with an ejection fraction $\leq 35\%$
- QRS duration ≥ 120 ms
- sinus rhythm.

There is no trial evidence on which to base a timeframe recommendation regarding how long to persist with medical therapy before proceeding to a device.

8.3 Implantable cardioverter defibrillators

Implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICDs) are first-line therapy for patients who have been resuscitated from ventricular fibrillation, or from sustained ventricular tachycardia with syncope, or from sustained ventricular tachycardia with haemodynamic compromise and an LVEF of 0.40 or less.

Use of ICDs is associated with a 20–30% relative reduction in mortality at 1 year, which is maintained over 3–5 years of follow-up. Long-term follow-up (mean of 5.6 years) of a subgroup of the CIDS study showed that survival curves continued to diverge. Absolute mortality of inpatients treated with amiodarone was 5.5% per year versus 2.8% per year in those receiving ICDs. At the end of this follow-up, the majority of patients assigned to amiodarone treatment had either died, had recurrence of arrhythmia, or required cessation of amiodarone because of side effects.¹⁸⁰

Two large randomised controlled trials have shown reduction in mortality following prophylactic implantation of ICDs in patients with LV dysfunction.

Table 8.1**Recommendations for device-based treatment of symptomatic CHF**

	Grade of recommendation
Biventricular pacing (cardiac resynchronisation therapy, with or without ICD) should be considered in patients with CHF who fulfil each of the following criteria: ¹⁷⁵ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYHA symptoms Class III–IV on treatment • dilated heart failure with LVEF $\leq 35\%$ • QRS duration ≥ 120 ms • sinus rhythm. 	A
ICD implantation should be considered in patients with CHF who fulfil any of the following criteria: ¹⁷⁷ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • survived cardiac arrest resulting from ventricular fibrillation or ventricular tachycardia not due to a transient or reversible cause • spontaneous sustained ventricular tachycardia in association with structural CHD • LVEF $\leq 30\%$ measured at least 1 month after acute MI, or 3 months after coronary artery revascularisation surgery • symptomatic CHF (i.e. NYHA functional class II–III) and LVEF $\leq 35\%$. 	A

One study¹⁸¹ included only patients with CHD and LVEF $\leq 30\%$ irrespective of symptoms, and the other¹⁸² included patients with NYHA Class II–III symptomatic heart failure from any cause with an LVEF $\leq 35\%$. Both studies showed a 20–30% relative reduction in mortality over a 1–5 year period. The absolute mortality benefit was approximately 1–3% per year compared to standard medical treatment.

Similar results were found in a smaller study of patients with non-ischaemic dilated cardiomyopathy and LVEF $\leq 35\%$.¹⁸³ Another study demonstrated a reduction in both all-cause mortality and the combined endpoint of death and hospitalisation using a combined biventricular and cardioverter defibrillator device in patients with NYHA III–IV symptomatic heart failure, LVEF $< 35\%$ and evidence of ventricular dyssynchrony (prolonged QRS duration).¹⁷⁷

ICD implantation may worsen quality of life, and the mortality benefit from ICD implantation needs to be balanced against the effects of living with a device that delivers painful shocks which are not controllable by the patient. However, the majority of patients will tolerate infrequent shocks in the knowledge that these are potentially life-saving. In patients with prolonged QRS duration, combining biventricular pacing with ICD implantation results in improvement in symptoms of heart failure as well as mortality.^{177,179}

ICDs are very expensive and there are large numbers of patients who potentially could benefit from their insertion. The implications of the significant resources associated with these devices should be the subject of ongoing discussion.

Practice point

Prophylactic ICD implantation may be considered in patients with an LVEF $\leq 35\%$; however, this is currently constrained by funding and other logistical issues. Until these issues are resolved, this therapy may not be universally available.

Decisions about pacing, cardiac resynchronisation therapy, defibrillators and choice of device are complex and generally require specialist review.

9

Surgery

Surgical management of mitral regurgitation

According to observational studies, the surgical management of mitral regurgitation with preservation of the subvalvular apparatus can produce significant improvement in both patient symptoms and preservation of LV function.¹⁸⁴ Mitral valvuloplasty (reconstruction) is favoured over valve replacement. Long-term warfarin therapy, with its attendant morbidity, may then be avoided (**Level of evidence: III-3**).

LV aneurysmectomy

LV aneurysmectomy may benefit patients with CHF in whom a large aneurysm can be excised, particularly if the remaining myocardium is functionally normal and there is minimal residual coronary artery disease.¹⁸⁵ A randomised trial is currently assessing the role of ventricular restoration surgery, which aims to surgically reverse the remodelling process by excluding the infarcted septum and adjacent free wall (**Level of evidence: III-3**).

LV free-wall excision

LV free-wall excision (Batista ventriculoplasty) — frequently with concomitant mitral valve repair/replacement — aims to restore a normal mass/volume ratio in patients with severe LV dilatation. This procedure has not yet been subjected to the clinical trials needed to define its place (if any) in the management of CHF¹⁸⁶ and has largely been abandoned in favour of mitral valvuloplasty, the Dor procedure and SAVE operation.

Cardiomyoplasty via stimulated skeletal muscle wraps has been used to augment the function of the failing left ventricle in patients with NYHA Class III symptoms and only modest LV dilatation.¹⁸⁷ Because of disappointing results with this approach, non-stimulated synthetic wraps, which passively restrict LV dilatation, have more recently been evaluated.¹⁸⁸ Preclinical and phase 1 clinical studies have demonstrated safety and a beneficial effect on adverse remodelling, a finding confirmed in a preliminary presentation of the results from a randomised controlled trial in CHF patients.¹⁸⁹ Further studies are in progress (**Level of evidence: III-3**).

Left ventricular assist devices

Left ventricular assist devices (LVADs) are most often used as a temporary bridge to cardiac transplantation, or for recovery of the heart post-cardiac surgery.¹⁹⁰ In a randomised controlled trial (REMATCH), the use

of LVADs was associated with improved survival and quality of life in patients with end-stage CHF who were ineligible for cardiac transplantation. There was, however, a greater than two-fold increased risk of serious adverse events, including infection, bleeding, thromboembolism and device malfunction.¹⁹¹ The prohibitive cost, large size, lack of total implantability and risk of complications limit the widespread use of currently available LVADs in patients with end-stage CHF. Compact continuous-flow LV-assist systems are undergoing clinical trial with the promise of a more favourable serious adverse event profile. They may also suit smaller adults and children with CHF who currently have no available mechanical circulatory support option (**Level of evidence: III**).

Cardiac transplantation

Cardiac transplantation is the 'gold standard' in cardiac replacement for selected patients with refractory CHF.¹⁹² Five-year survival is 65–75%, but donor shortage means it is only available to a very small subset of patients. Generally accepted indications and contraindications for transplantation are listed in **Table 9.1**. Patients with NYHA Class IV symptoms, who are candidates for transplantation and who are not responding to manipulation of medical therapy, should be referred early for assessment, as the later development of end-organ dysfunction may exclude them as recipients (**Level of evidence: III-3**).

Table 9.1**Indications and contraindications for cardiac transplantation**

Indications for cardiac transplantation	
Definite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent NYHA Class IV symptoms • VO₂ max <10 mL/kg/min • Severe ischaemia not amenable to revascularisation • Recurrent uncontrollable ventricular arrhythmias
Probable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYHA Class III • VO₂ max <14 mL/kg/min + major limitation • Recurrent unstable angina with poor LV function
Inadequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LVEF <20% without significant symptoms • Past history of NYHA Class III or IV symptoms • VO₂ max >14 mL/kg/min without other indication
Relative contraindications to cardiac transplantation	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age >65 • Active infection • Untreated malignancy, or treated malignancy in remission and <5 years follow-up • Fixed high pulmonary pressures (pulmonary vascular resistance >4 Wood units, or mean transpulmonary gradient >12 mmHg or pulmonary artery systolic pressure >60 mmHg) • Current substance abuse (including tobacco and alcohol) • Coexisting systemic illness likely to limit survival • Severe and irreversible major organ dysfunction • Adverse psychosocial factors limiting compliance with medical therapy • Recent pulmonary embolism (<6 weeks) • Diabetes mellitus with severe or progressive end-organ damage • Morbid obesity • Unhealed peptic ulceration

Coronary revascularisation for CHD in patients with CHF

Patients with CHD who present with CHF (CHD–CHF) should be considered for coronary revascularisation after optimal pharmacological therapy has been started. Those with angina pectoris, a surrogate marker of viable ischaemic myocardium, are the more favourable candidates for coronary artery bypass graft surgery. However, diabetic patients with CHD–CHF who may not manifest angina as a symptom, warrant a more objective assessment of their myocardial status before excluding revascularisation as a therapeutic option.

For objective investigation of myocardial ischaemia and viability, dipyridamole and exercise thallium tests have been supplemented by PET scanning and, more recently, cardiac MRI. Individually, or in combination, the aforementioned can provide an objective assessment of the potential benefit of coronary revascularisation in the majority of CHF patients with CHD.²⁰ However, there are no randomised controlled studies assessing the role of coronary revascularisation in the treatment of heart failure symptoms (**Level of evidence: III-3**).

Adjunctive surgical procedures, including mitral valvuloplasty, Dor and SAVE procedures, may be performed in patients with CHD–CHF in combination with surgical revascularisation or, on occasion, as isolated procedures.



10

Acute exacerbations of CHF

The three archetypal forms of CHF exacerbation are acute cardiogenic pulmonary oedema (APO), cardiogenic shock and most commonly 'decompensated CHF'. However, in clinical practice, exacerbations include a range of clinical appearances in which the boundaries between the classic syndromes are often blurred through overlap.

Decompensated CHF — which refers to an acute or subacute worsening of status and a consequent increase in the cardinal manifestations (dyspnoea, fatigue, oedema) — appears increasingly in the cardiology literature.

Patients with decompensated CHF characteristically present with symptoms of fluid overload, such as increasing dyspnoea, orthopnoea, PND, peripheral oedema, anorexia and abdominal discomfort due to liver and gut oedema, and increasing lethargy. The cardinal clinical sign of fluid overload is recent weight gain. Characteristically, there is a third heart sound, tachycardia and hypotension. The overlap with APO can be considerable, as both conditions are associated with dyspnoea due to increased lung water content. However, APO is truly acute (hence the term 'flash pulmonary oedema') and is typically a condition of wet lungs without extravascular fluid overload (i.e. acute diastolic LV failure).¹⁹³ In decompensated CHF the picture is subacute, extending over more than 6 hours of increasing symptoms with clinical signs of intravascular, pulmonary and peripheral fluid overload.

Given the high prevalence and growing incidence of CHF in Australia, an enormous amount of clinician time and effort is spent on management of decompensated CHF through outpatient, GP, specialist or nurse reviews and inpatient management. Indeed, approximately 70% of the total healthcare cost of CHF is related to the cost of hospitalisation.¹⁹⁴

10.1 Management of decompensated CHF

Identify and treat the underlying cause

Occasionally the underlying cause of decompensated CHF requires specific therapy that is more urgent than treatment of the CHF (e.g. cardiac ischaemia or infection). Decompensated CHF may be due to cardiac problems, patient non-compliance, drug changes and comorbidities.

Cardiac issues that may worsen CHF are mainly ischaemia, arrhythmias (most commonly atrial fibrillation) and valvular dysfunction.

Patient non-compliance refers to non-adherence to salt and fluid restriction and cessation of medications (particularly frusemide).

Drug changes refers to commencement of drugs that:

- (i) predispose to renal dysfunction and salt and water retention (e.g. non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, COX-2 inhibitors, corticosteroids, thiazolidinediones) and
- (ii) are negatively inotropic (e.g. diltiazem, verapamil, class I anti-arrhythmics, high-dose beta-blockers).

Comorbid conditions refers to:

- infections (particularly pulmonary) which are a common precipitant of decompensation, largely through haemodynamic changes
- renal failure leading to fluid overload
- anaemia or pulmonary emboli, which make it more difficult to maintain adequate oxygen delivery
- thyroid imbalance.

Treatment

Oxygen

During decompensation, oxygen administration will relieve symptoms of dyspnoea and increase tissue oxygen delivery. On occasions, oxygen therapy may have independent beneficial effects, for example in myocardial ischaemia.

Diuretics

Loop diuretics, such as frusemide, reduce sodium reabsorption in the loop of Henle and result in increased sodium and water excretion. Patients with decompensated CHF often require an increase in their usual oral or intravenous dose of frusemide to clear the fluid overload. With oral diuretics, a vicious cycle may develop where deteriorating clinical status contributes to gut wall oedema, leading to reduced absorption of medication, less effective fluid loss and further clinical deterioration. Hence, intravenous dosage can play a critical role in acute management.^{195,196}

Thiazide diuretics generally have little role in management. However, in decompensated CHF, where a patient is maintained on regular high dosage of frusemide, diuretic resistance is often encountered due to a homeostatic increase in sodium reabsorption in the distal tubule of the nephron.^{197,198} In this situation, short-term additional thiazide administration can evoke a powerful diuretic response through blocking sodium uptake in the distal tubule.¹⁹⁸

In using these measures to relieve fluid overload in decompensation, great care must be taken to avoid overzealous diuresis leading to hypovolaemia and its consequences (acute renal failure, postural dizziness), as well as hypokalaemia. Regular clinical assessment of intravascular fluid status and monitoring of plasma potassium levels and renal function are therefore required.

Morphine

Morphine has beneficial effects on cardiac and respiratory status in APO, where venodilatation and a reduction in respiratory drive and the work of breathing are desirable. However, in the subacute setting of decompensated CHF, other venodilators are preferred. There is some evidence that morphine may be detrimental in acute MI and APO, and its place in management of APO is now controversial.¹⁹⁹

Nitrates

Nitrates are predominantly venodilators, but also have the effect of epicardial artery dilatation, and hence they are particularly desirable in the setting of decompensation induced by cardiac ischaemia. Nitrates may also have a role in decompensation through their beneficial haemodynamic effects,²⁰⁰ particularly in reducing central blood volume and filling pressure (as occurs in APO treatment). This can often relieve symptoms of pulmonary congestion, particularly at night when the heart is exposed to increased filling pressures due to the recumbent position. Evidence from large-scale, randomised controlled trials of the effect of nitrates alone in decompensated CHF is lacking.

Other vasodilators

Long-term vasodilators, such as ACEIs and angiotensin II receptor antagonists, can be continued, increased or added throughout the decompensation period, particularly if blood pressure is relatively elevated (>120/70 mmHg). However, more often than not, decompensation is associated with hypotension, and there is little scope for an acute increase in these vasodilators.

Beta-blockers

Beta-blockers should not be commenced or increased during the acute decompensation episode, as the acute negative inotropic effect of these agents at a time of fluid overload may worsen clinical status. However, a recent open-label study has demonstrated that, following stabilisation of symptoms, commencement of carvedilol during inpatient treatment for decompensation is safe and possibly beneficial.²⁰¹

Occasionally, decompensation is managed by temporary reduction in dosage of beta-blockers to allow diuresis and cardiac unloading. Cessation of beta-blockers should be reserved for cases of cardiogenic shock.

Non-invasive assisted ventilation

CPAP ventilation has a well-defined role in APO. In decompensation, assisted ventilation has a much lesser role as there is little trial evidence to support it. The use of non-invasive assisted ventilation is largely confined to the overlap syndrome, where pulmonary oedema and poor oxygenation are dominant clinical issues in decompensation.

Mechanical support

A variety of mechanical cardiac support mechanisms is available and in various stages of development for acute exacerbations of CHF. These devices — which include the intra-aortic balloon pump and LVADs — have their major role in cardiogenic shock and are generally only used as a short-term bridge to a more definitive therapy, such as cardiac surgery or transplantation. Long-term use of LVADs as definitive therapy is in the early stages of exploration, and may in future be a viable therapeutic modality in advanced CHF where decompensation episodes are frequent.^{191,202}

Inotropic therapy

This is discussed in [Section 7.3](#).

10.2 Management of APO

APO is a life-threatening condition due to the rapid accumulation of fluid within the pulmonary alveoli. The severe nature of this condition warrants rapid institution of emergency measures, while ascertaining the underlying causes of the episode. These emergency measures and the evidence for the routine therapies in APO are summarised below.

Emergency measures

The severe hypoxaemia produced by APO warrants immediate emergency measures based on the basic ABC principles of resuscitation summarised in [Table 10.1](#).

Airway (A) obstruction must be excluded and is readily identified by the respiratory pattern, history and chest x-ray. Breathing (B) is characterised by air hunger and tachypnoea due to hypoxaemia. Oxygen therapy is essential and should preferably be delivered via CPAP or BiPAP. If hypoxaemia cannot be readily corrected with these non-invasive methods and the patient is showing evidence of respiratory fatigue (i.e. impaired consciousness and/or hypoventilation), then intubation and mechanical ventilation must be considered.

The circulatory status (C) of the patient must be rapidly assessed, and any tachyarrhythmia (e.g. atrial fibrillation or ventricular tachycardia) promptly treated with anti-arrhythmic agents or electrical cardioversion. The presence of hypotension (systolic blood pressure <90 mmHg) with APO constitutes a diagnosis of cardiogenic shock and requires emergency circulatory assistance with inotropes and/or intra-aortic balloon pump insertion.



The basic ABC principles are extended in APO to include differential diagnosis (D) and aetiology (E) (see [Table 10.1](#)). Although the diagnosis of cardiogenic APO is often readily made on clinical grounds, other differential diagnoses need to be considered. Non-cardiogenic APO is due primarily to a disruption in the alveolar–capillary membrane from a pathogenic insult (e.g. trauma, surgery), which is often evident from the patient's history. Patients with chronic obstructive airways disease often present with cardiogenic APO due to coexisting cardiac disease; differentiation between these conditions may be difficult. Other differential diagnoses (see [Table 10.1](#)) are often easily identified.

The diagnosis and resuscitative treatment of APO are only the initial steps, as the aetiology (E) must be quickly identified and reversible causes rapidly treated. The presence of myocardial ischaemia should be promptly assessed with an ECG, as the presence of ST segment elevation will require specific therapies such as immediate percutaneous coronary intervention or thrombolytic therapy. Identifying the precipitant of the APO episode is important, as well as the underlying cardiac pathology, since this will influence subsequent management to prevent future episodes.

An approach to management

The early management of cardiogenic APO involves the use of pharmacological and/or mechanical therapies. The choice of therapy will depend upon the patient's status and availability of the particular treatment. Pharmacological therapies include the use of morphine, diuretics and nitrates, which are all readily available. Non-invasive mechanical therapies such as CPAP or BiPAP may be less readily available in peripheral hospitals.

The evidence for utilising various therapies in APO is primarily based upon endpoints, such as improvements in haemodynamics or oxygenation, as there are few studies examining cardiac events (e.g. death/myocardial infarction).

Intravenous morphine and frusemide are time-honoured therapies for APO and have been shown to produce favourable haemodynamic effects in this condition^{203,204} via their venodilating properties. Nitrates also have beneficial haemodynamic effects in APO, and these are superior to diuretic therapy.²⁰⁵ Comparative studies using clinical endpoints suggest a superior effect with nitrates,^{206,207} especially in patients with significant concurrent ischaemia.²⁰⁸ However, nitrates had only marginal benefit over frusemide/morphine therapy in relation to correcting arterial hypoxaemia in APO.²⁰⁹

In contrast to intubation and mechanical ventilation, which is mandatory in the moribund patient and inappropriate for randomised investigations, non-invasive ventilatory therapies have been evaluated in randomised controlled trials. The use of CPAP in APO has been shown to improve oxygenation and reduce the need for intubation and mechanical

ventilation, compared with high-flow oxygen therapy.²¹⁰ Whereas CPAP applies a fixed positive airway pressure throughout the respiratory cycle, in BiPAP there is an increased pressure during inspiration and a reduced pressure in expiration, thereby reducing the patient's respiratory work. Two small studies have supported a benefit of BiPAP over CPAP in relation to respiratory muscle work²¹¹ and oxygenation.²¹²

Contemporary management of cardiogenic acute pulmonary oedema

In summary, the patient presenting with suspected APO requires immediate emergency resuscitation using an ABCDE approach. Once a clinical diagnosis of APO is established, early amelioration of hypoxaemia with oxygen and/or non-invasive mechanical ventilatory therapies is important, as is the rapid initiation of nitrates, morphine and/or frusemide therapy. Prompt identification of the underlying pathology and possible precipitant/s is required as specific therapies directed towards reversible causes is essential.

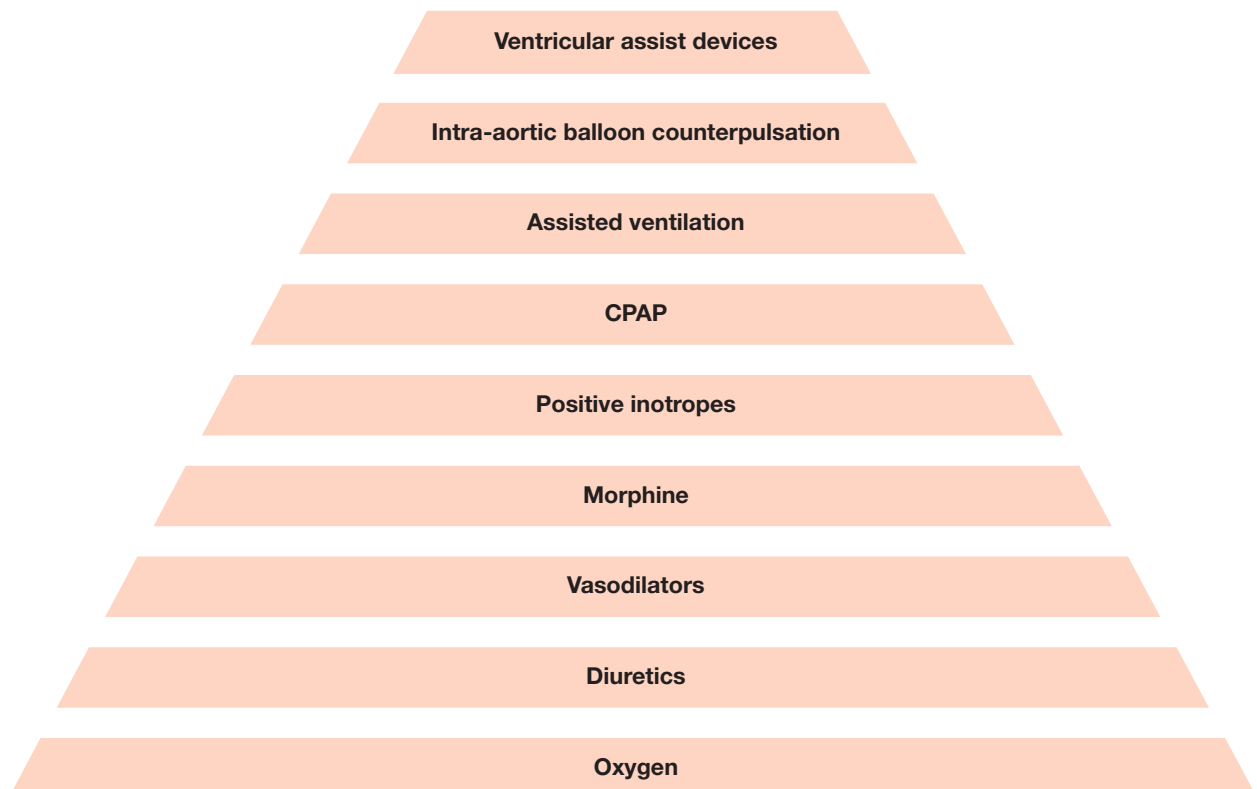
Practice point

APO is a life-threatening disorder. However, appropriate therapy will often result in a marked improvement in the patient's clinical status within a few hours.

Table 10.1
Emergency management of suspected cardiogenic APO

A (airway)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclude obstruction
B (breathing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hypoxaemia (→ oxygenation) • Respiratory fatigue (→ mechanical ventilation)
C (circulation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heart rate/rhythm (→ anti-arrhythmics/cardioversion) • Hypotension (→ inotropes/intra-aortic balloon pump)
D (differential diagnosis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardiogenic APO • Non-cardiogenic pulmonary oedema • Acute exacerbation of airways disease • Acute massive pulmonary embolism • Pneumothorax • Foreign body aspiration • Hyperventilation syndrome
E (aetiology) (cardiogenic APO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precipitants • Ischaemia, tachyarrhythmia, fluid overload, medication • Underlying pathology • Systolic LV dysfunction — coronary heart disease, dilated cardiomyopathy, mitral regurgitation • Diastolic LV dysfunction — hypertensive heart disease, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, aortic stenosis • Normal LV function — mitral stenosis

Figure 10.1
Emergency therapy of acute heart failure





11

Heart failure with preserved systolic function

11.1 Definition and diagnosis

The existence of heart failure with preserved systolic function (HFPSF), or diastolic heart failure, is universally accepted, but its precise definition, and hence epidemiology, is the subject of much debate. The diagnosis of possible or probable diastolic heart failure is based on the combination of clinical CHF and preserved LV systolic function.⁴ This requires demonstrable symptoms and physical signs of CHF, chest radiological evidence and an LVEF of at least 45% on echocardiography, gated blood pool scanning, or direct left ventriculography.

Myocardial ischaemia should be excluded as a cause of dyspnoea in patients with normal LV systolic function at rest. Patients with CHD represent a clinically distinct patient population with specific therapeutic requirements which differ from those with diastolic heart failure. It must also be emphasised that diastolic dysfunction is not synonymous with diastolic heart failure, and the physiological significance of mildly abnormal LV filling patterns on echocardiography is unclear, particularly in older patients.

Where possible, investigations should be carried out within 72 hours of presentation with CHF.⁴ Direct measurement of increased LV end-diastolic pressures or prolonged Tau at cardiac catheterisation are the 'gold standard' for the diagnosis of diastolic heart failure,⁴ but this is rarely achievable in practice.

More practical measures include echocardiographic demonstration of abnormalities of transmitral Doppler filling profiles,²¹³ or of LV relaxation using tissue Doppler imaging²¹⁴ and left atrial enlargement. Measurement of plasma levels of BNP, released in response to ventricular stretch, has shown promise in the diagnosis and prognosis of patients with systolic heart failure. However, as few data are available in diastolic heart failure, the role of BNP in the diagnosis and management of this condition remains undefined to date.

11.2 Epidemiology/clinical characteristics

Most studies report that 30–50% patients in the community presenting with CHF have normal or near normal LV systolic function (LVEF \geq 45%).^{215–219} Diastolic heart failure is more common in women and the elderly and, when coronary and valvular heart disease are

excluded, is largely a consequence of hypertensive heart disease, the ageing heart, and diabetes.²¹⁹

While prospective outcome studies of patients with diastolic heart failure have demonstrated a lower short-term mortality compared to patients with systolic dysfunction, the mortality rate remains high compared to controls.²¹⁶ Hospital readmission rates are high and are similar to those of patients with systolic dysfunction.²¹⁹

Practice point

Although the epidemiology of HFPSF or diastolic heart failure has been incompletely described, the main risk factors are advanced age, hypertension, diabetes, LV hypertrophy and CHD. Diagnosis, investigation and treatment are summarised in [Table 11.1](#).

11.3 Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is characterised by severe myocardial hypertrophy and abnormal diastolic function. Most cases are hereditary, and many patients are asymptomatic, but the condition can present with angina, syncope, arrhythmias, cardiac arrest/sudden death. Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy can present with breathlessness on effort and other features of cardiac failure. It is an uncommon cause of diastolic heart failure.

Occasionally, treatment by percutaneous or open intervention to relieve obstruction in the LV outflow tract is effective. However, in most cases, the treatment of CHF in hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is the same as treatment of diastolic heart failure described below.

11.4 Restrictive cardiomyopathy

Rarely, the LV cavity may become obliterated by infiltration of the wall by material such as amyloid or the results of inflammation (typically sarcoidosis). Such patients can present with diastolic heart failure. Again, the treatment of CHF in this situation is the same as that described below.

11.5 Treatment of HFPSF

The goals of treatment are similar to those for systolic heart failure: relief of symptoms, improved physical activity tolerance and quality of life, reduced hospital readmissions and improved survival. However, current treatment is empirical rather than evidence-based. Randomised controlled trials are in progress, and in future it may be possible to prescribe evidence-based treatment.

Management of acute symptoms

This includes treatment of pulmonary congestion and peripheral oedema with diuretics and control of ventricular rate in patients with atrial fibrillation. Restriction of salt and fluid intake should be considered. These patients may be very sensitive to changes in volume due to reduced LV compliance, so care must be taken not to induce hypovolaemia through excessive diuresis. It should be noted that such treatment recommendations are based on general clinical principles rather than randomised clinical trials.

Treatment of underlying causes and improvement of LV diastolic function

While there is strong evidence that blood pressure reduction in hypertensive patients reduces the risk of CHF,¹¹⁶ specific evidence of reversal of associated diastolic dysfunction is lacking. Similarly, in treating diabetes mellitus, tight glycaemic control is mandatory, but no studies have yet demonstrated reversal of diastolic dysfunction with this approach. Nevertheless, it is prudent to treat these underlying conditions aggressively in patients with accompanying diastolic heart failure.

In a large randomised study of patients with CHF and an ejection fraction of >40% (CHARM-Preserved), significantly fewer patients treated with the angiotensin II receptor antagonist candesartan were admitted to hospital one or more times, compared with those receiving usual treatment (230 vs 279), as reported by the investigator. However, there was no effect on the primary endpoint of cardiovascular death or hospitalisation.²²⁰

In summary, the current primary focus of intervention in patients with diastolic heart failure is optimum management of the underlying cause(s), predominantly diabetes mellitus and hypertension. It would seem prudent, when indicated, to include drugs that are proven to have beneficial effects on LV hypertrophy, such as the ACEIs and angiotensin II receptor antagonists.^{221,222} Given that coronary artery disease is common in this patient population, it remains important to assess for and treat ischaemia.

Table 11.1

Diagnosis, investigation and treatment of HFPSF

Diagnosis

- Clinical history of CHF
- Exclude myocardial ischaemia, valvular disease
- Objective evidence of CHF (x-ray consistent with CHF)
- Ejection fraction $\geq 45\%$ (echocardiography, gated blood pool scanning, left ventriculography)
- Echocardiographic or cardiac catheterisation evidence of diastolic dysfunction, where possible
- Use of plasma BNP measurement for diagnosis of diastolic heart failure is not proven

Investigations

Echocardiography

- Pseudonormal or restrictive filling pattern demonstrated by mitral inflow (age appropriate)
- Left atrial enlargement
- Reduced septal annular velocity (Ea) on tissue Doppler imaging
- Ratio of E wave to Ea >15

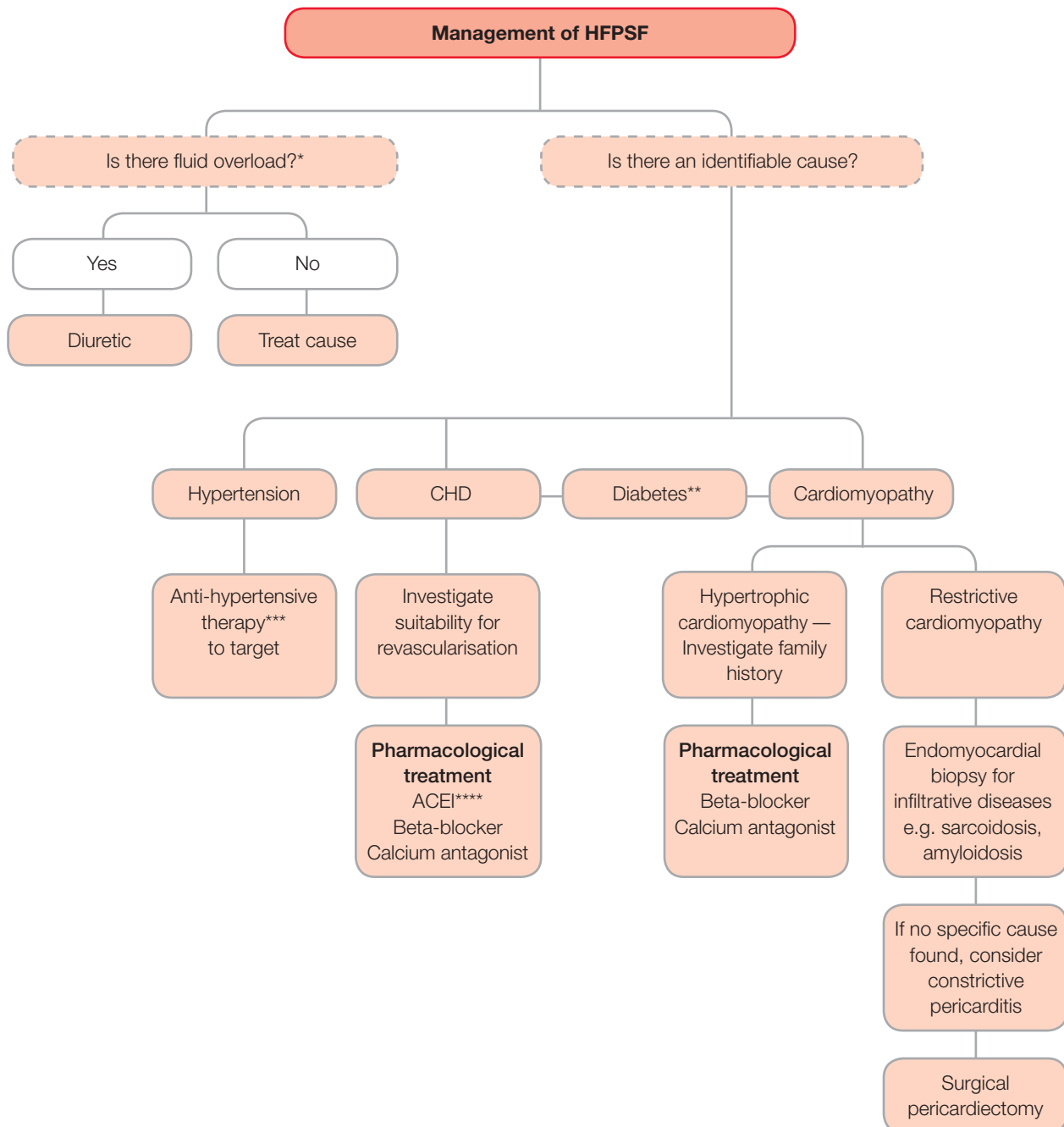
Cardiac catheterisation

- Elevated LV end diastolic pressure
- Prolonged Tau

Treatment (empirical at this stage)

- Aggressive risk factor reduction
- Hypertension — BP reduction; consider ACEIs or angiotensin II receptor antagonists to reduce LV hypertrophy
- Diabetes mellitus — strict glycaemic and BP control; consider ACEIs or angiotensin II receptor antagonists early, using lower BP recommendations for treating hypertension in diabetic patients

Figure 11.1
Management of HFPSF (diastolic heart failure)



* With rare exception, patients with diastolic heart failure present with symptoms and signs of fluid overload, either pulmonary or systemic congestion or both.

** Better diabetes control.

*** Choice of therapy will vary according to clinical circumstances, e.g. thiazide diuretic — elderly, systolic hypertension; ACEI — LV hypertrophy, diabetes, CHD; beta-blocker — angina.

**** If ACEI intolerant, use angiotensin II receptor antagonist instead.

Treatment of associated disorders

12.1 Cardiac arrhythmia

Atrial fibrillation and atrial flutter

Paroxysmal or sustained atrial flutter or fibrillation occur frequently in patients with CHF. Atrial fibrillation, in particular, worsens symptomatic status and markedly increases the risk of thromboembolic complications. While electrophysiological ablation prevents recurrence of atrial flutter in about 95% of cases, the role of curative ablation for atrial fibrillation remains controversial. Although some recent trials have suggested reduction in risk of stroke and improvement in ventricular function in patients undergoing atrial fibrillation ablation procedures, these data have not yet been widely reproduced. Therefore, pharmacotherapy remains an important mainstay in the treatment of atrial fibrillation.

Patients with CHF who develop atrial fibrillation will require long-term anticoagulation with warfarin (unless an acute reversible cause of atrial fibrillation such as thyrotoxicosis can be identified). Efforts should be made to restore and maintain sinus rhythm in patients with atrial fibrillation who experience symptomatic deterioration, especially in those with diastolic dysfunction. This may require episodic electrical cardioversion. These patients should remain on warfarin long term in between atrial fibrillation episodes.²²³

If it is apparent that sinus rhythm cannot be maintained for prolonged periods, therapy should be directed at controlling ventricular response rate (with digoxin, beta-blockers or amiodarone) and reducing thromboembolic risk with warfarin. For patients in whom adequate rate control cannot be achieved pharmacologically, tachycardia-mediated cardiomyopathy may lead to deterioration of CHF symptoms. For these patients, AV node ablation and permanent pacing is an important option. In this group, biventricular pacing may be better than pacing the right ventricular apex. However, this has not been tested in a randomised controlled trial (see [Section 8.2](#) for more information).

Prophylactic anti-arrhythmic therapy for patients with atrial fibrillation and CHF usually requires amiodarone, the most effective agent available. However, long-term efficacy will be limited by patient intolerance and side effects. Sotalol is an alternative, particularly when LV function is only mildly impaired. However, it is associated with a 1–3% incidence of ventricular pro-arrhythmia, and efficacy at one year is only 40–50%.²²⁴

Ventricular tachycardia and ventricular fibrillation

Although the incidence of ventricular fibrillation increases as LV function worsens, there is still a significant risk in patients with mild to moderate CHF. The strongest single predictor of sudden cardiac death is the LVEF.

ICDs are first-line therapy for patients who have been resuscitated from ventricular fibrillation, or from sustained ventricular tachycardia with syncope, or from sustained ventricular tachycardia with haemodynamic compromise and an ejection fraction of 0.40 or less (see [Section 8.3](#) for more information).

Large randomised studies of amiodarone therapy versus placebo have not shown any survival benefit with the drug for primary prevention in high-risk patients.^{182,225,226}

Treatment with sotalol or amiodarone may be required in 20–70% of ICD recipients to reduce frequency of ventricular tachycardia and shocks. Radiofrequency ablation is suitable for some patients with recurrent ventricular tachycardia to reduce ICD shock frequency.

Therapy with class I anti-arrhythmic agents (e.g. flecainide) is generally contraindicated in the presence of systolic heart failure.

12.2 Valvular heart disease

Symptoms of CHF are common in patients with mitral or aortic valve disease. Surgical treatment often normalises cardiac function, but some patients show residual failure after surgery, and a minority are unsuitable surgical candidates.

Patients with severe aortic stenosis — an increasing cause of CHF in older people — respond poorly to medical therapy. Arterial vasodilators, including ACEIs, are usually contraindicated in these patients because of the risk of coronary hypoperfusion. Appropriate medical therapy should therefore include digoxin and diuretics.

12.3 CHD

Reversible myocardial ischaemia may occur with little or no discomfort (e.g. in older people and those with diabetes), and prolonged ischaemia may lead to apparently 'fixed' dysfunction of the left ventricle (myocardial 'hibernation'). For these



reasons, revascularisation may represent the primary therapeutic option in selected patients with CHF. Those with reversible ischaemia should be considered for myocardial revascularisation procedures.

Non-dihydropyridine calcium-channel blockers should be avoided as anti-anginal therapy in patients with LVEFs below 40%. Dihydropyridine calcium antagonists (amlodipine, felodipine) can be used in patients with CHD.

Beta-blockers represent a major component of anti-anginal therapy in CHF, and should be used whenever tolerated. Prophylactic nitrate therapy should usually be a component of anti-anginal therapy in CHF. Patients with severe angina, systolic heart failure and inoperable disease should be considered for prophylactic therapy with perhexiline, as long as regular monitoring of plasma drug levels is performed to prevent toxicity.

Decubitus angina (nocturnal angina associated with orthopnoea) should be treated essentially as CHF. Useful measures include prescribing a loop diuretic in the afternoon (to minimise filling pressures overnight) and prophylactic nitrate therapy at night.

12.4 Arthritis

Patients with severe systolic dysfunction and/or hyponatraemia should not be treated with large doses of COX inhibitors (both non-selective and COX-2-selective) for arthritis, as they will increase the risk of worsening CHF.²²⁷

Low-dose aspirin (up to 150 mg/day) appears to be well tolerated in patients with CHF. Higher doses should probably be avoided.²²⁸ There is controversy regarding a possible interaction between aspirin and ACEIs that might decrease the efficacy of the latter agents.²²⁹

12.5 Chronic renal failure

The presence of renal dysfunction and or renovascular disease should be considered in all patients with CHF who are elderly, have a history of hypertension, or have diabetes mellitus. The presence of renal impairment is associated with a worse prognosis in patients with CHF.^{230,231} Conversely, elderly patients with renal impairment, and patients with diabetic nephropathy, have a higher risk of developing CHF.²³² The presence of CHF further impairs renal function. Hence in patients with renal impairment, plasma electrolytes and renal function should be monitored, particularly when significant changes in cardiac status or modifications to therapy occur.

Patients with renal disease often have excessive salt and water retention, requiring higher doses of loop diuretics. In patients with a creatinine clearance below 30 mL/min, thiazide diuretics are ineffective. ACEIs have been associated with reduced mortality in patients with CHF and renal disease.²³³ Although

an acute decline in renal function can occur with the introduction of ACEIs or angiotensin II receptor antagonists, renal function will generally stabilise, and ultimately the use of these agents will preserve glomerular filtration.

If continued renal deterioration occurs, concurrent renovascular disease should be excluded. Treatment of concurrent renovascular disease may help salt and water excretion, as well as the use of ACEIs or angiotensin II receptor antagonists. The use of ACEIs after acute anterior infarction has been shown to preserve renal function and protect against the development of CHF, independent of the baseline renal function.²³⁴ In patients with type 2 diabetes and nephropathy, angiotensin II receptor antagonists protect against the development of CHF.²³⁵

The use of beta-blockers has not been assessed in patients with renal disease. Carvedilol and metoprolol are both excreted by the liver and do not accumulate in the presence of renal impairment.

Spirolactone carries a significant risk of hyperkalaemia, particularly in patients who are also taking an ACEI or an angiotensin II receptor antagonist and whose creatinine clearance is less than 30 mL/min. It should be used with caution in patients with creatinine clearances between 30–60 mL/min.

Renal dysfunction is associated with impaired clearance of digoxin; to avoid toxicity, the maintenance dose of the drug should be reduced and plasma levels monitored. Renal disease is associated with erythropoietin deficiency and anaemia that may worsen cardiac output. Correction of anaemia with erythropoietic agents has been shown to improve cardiac function.²³⁶

Among patients with renal disease, there is a high prevalence of sleep apnoea that may worsen CHF. In patients on haemodialysis, CHF may be better alleviated by daily dialysis therapy.²³⁷

12.6 Anaemia

CHF may be associated with a normocytic normochromic anaemia. Rigorous exclusion of other causes of anaemia is required before this diagnosis can be made. Possible explanations for the association include concomitant chronic renal impairment, toxic effects of pro-inflammatory cytokines, haemodilution and the use of drugs (e.g. ACEIs) that tend to lower haemoglobin levels. There are strong epidemiological associations between the degree of anaemia on one hand and the severity of symptoms and patients' prognosis on the other. Furthermore, reversal of anaemia with agents such as erythropoietin has been demonstrated (in small studies) to improve physical activity tolerance and even cardiac function. Large-scale trials of the impact of erythropoietin, or its analogues, on physical activity capacity and clinical events are in progress.¹⁶

12.7 Cancer

Cancer chemotherapy, particularly with anthracycline derivatives, may lead to the development of CHF; the risk is directly related to cumulative anthracycline dosage. Pre-existent impairment of LV systolic function represents a relative contraindication to aggressive chemotherapy with such agents.

12.8 Diabetes

Diabetes is a noted comorbidity in 10–30% of patients in community-based studies and in participants in clinical trials of CHF.¹⁶ The diagnosis of diabetes is not only an independent risk factor for the development of CHF, but is also associated with an adverse outcome in patients with established disease.^{238,239}

While efforts should be made to achieve good glycaemic control, metformin should be avoided — particularly in patients with severe or decompensated CHF — because of an increased risk of lactic acidosis. Thiazolidenediones ('glitazones') may lead to fluid retention and should not be used in patients with NYHA Class III or IV symptoms. In patients with Class I and II symptoms, 'glitazone' therapy should be initiated with caution and promptly withdrawn if heart failure worsens.

ACEIs are effective in the treatment of CHF in diabetic patients, as are beta-blockers.²⁴⁰ However, despite their demonstrated efficacy and safety, beta-blockers are under-prescribed in this situation. Patients with diabetes, in whom hyporeninaemic hypoaldosteronism is common, may be at risk of developing hyperkalaemia when an angiotensin II receptor antagonist is added to ACEI therapy, and vigilant monitoring of serum potassium is recommended.²⁴⁰

12.9 Thromboembolism

There is evidence that CHF is associated with an increased risk of thromboembolism (e.g. because of the frequent presence of thrombi within akinetic segments of failing ventricle and an increased propensity to develop atrial fibrillation). The SOLVD trial clearly demonstrated an increase in the incidence of stroke (mainly thromboembolic) with decreasing ventricular function.²⁴¹ However, retrospective analyses of studies of anti-thrombotic therapy in CHF have yielded conflicting results.

There is an urgent need for prospective studies of anticoagulation in CHF patients in sinus rhythm, using agents such as warfarin. An early pilot trial, the Warfarin/Aspirin Study in Heart failure (WASH) study, compared groups taking aspirin, warfarin and no anticoagulation.²⁴² There was no significant difference between groups within this small study, although there was a tendency towards an increase in hospitalisation

in the aspirin group. This may be due to adverse interactions between aspirin and ACEIs, offsetting the beneficial effects of the latter.

The WATCH trial compared open-label warfarin with blinded anti-platelet therapy (either aspirin or clopidogrel) in patients with NYHA Class II–IV symptoms and an LVEF of less than 30%.²⁴³ The primary endpoint was a composite of all-cause mortality, non-fatal MI and non-fatal stroke. Unfortunately, the study was truncated before full recruitment had been achieved and, consequently, was underpowered to explore planned primary or secondary endpoints. Nevertheless, hospitalisation for heart failure seemed again to be increased in aspirin-treated patients. The precise role of inhibitors of adenosine diphosphate, activation of platelets (e.g. clopidogrel), and of warfarin in prophylaxis of thromboembolism in CHF, remain uncertain. Similarly, the role of newer agents, such as direct thrombin inhibitors, has not as yet been prospectively studied in this condition.

12.10 Gout

Gout is a common comorbid association in patients with CHF. Patients with CHF have elevated levels of plasma urate, and these levels confer adverse prognostic significance. However, a recent trial of xanthine oxidase inhibition in patients with CHF did not demonstrate benefits on clinical outcomes. Gout is also common in CHF patients because many of the treatments used in the management of this condition are associated with elevations in plasma urate, e.g. diuretic therapies.

Treatment of gout in the patient with CHF is made somewhat more complex by the contraindication to the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and COX-2 inhibitors. Similarly, corticosteroids are also best avoided in the management of this complication in the CHF patient. Colchicine is the preferred treatment option in the acute management of this condition, with allopurinol recommended for recurrent attacks as chronic therapy if required.



13

Post-discharge management programs

The sections describing pharmacological and non-pharmacological management of CHF provide a good insight into the complexities of treating patients with this syndrome. These complexities are emphasised when one considers that most affected individuals are old and have many comorbidities likely to complicate treatment, and that the current healthcare system appears unable to organise their care in a systematic and coordinated manner.

Within this context there are many preventable and often interrelated factors contributing to poorer outcomes among older patients. These potentially modifiable factors can be summarised as follows:

- inadequate/inappropriate medical treatment or adverse effects of prescribed treatment
- inadequate knowledge of the underlying illness and prescribed treatment
- inadequate response to, or recognition of, acute episodes of clinical deterioration
- non-adherence to prescribed pharmacological treatment
- lack of motivation/inability to adhere to a non-pharmacological management plan
- problems with caregivers or extended care facilities
- poor social support.²⁴⁴

Specialist opinion should be obtained for all patients with CHF, in view of the severity, the symptomatic limitation, the prognosis and the complex nature of the condition and its management. Specialist care has been shown to improve outcomes, reduce hospitalisation and improve symptoms in patients with heart failure (**Level of evidence: IIB**). At a minimum, such as for patients who are geographically isolated, specialist opinion should be sought:

- when the diagnosis is in question
- when there is a question regarding management issues
- when the patient is being considered for revascularisation (percutaneous or surgical)
- when the patient is being considered for a pacemaker, defibrillator or resynchronisation device
- when the patient is being considered for heart or heart/lung transplantation
- at the request of the local medical officer to help guide management and clarify prognosis
- in patients under 65 years of age.

There are reliable data to suggest that up to two-thirds of CHF-related hospitalisations are indeed preventable.⁵¹ Many of the factors listed above are often addressed in the 'usual care' arms of clinical trials, with the provision of increased monitoring and individualised follow-up. It is not surprising, therefore, that patients in clinical trials usually have lower than anticipated morbidity and mortality rates than the typical old and fragile patients seen by clinicians in real life.^{245,246}

In order to provide the same level of expert and individualised care to the general patient population with CHF, a range of specialist management programs have been developed and applied. The most successful of these have focused on the above issues and incorporate the following features:

- targeting high-risk individuals following acute hospitalisation
- multidisciplinary approach
- individualised care
- patient education and counselling (often involving the family/carer)
- promoting self-care behaviours
- intensive follow-up to detect and address clinical problems on a proactive basis
- strategies to apply evidence-based pharmacological treatment and to improve adherence
- application of non-pharmacological strategies where appropriate (e.g. fluid and electrolyte management and physical activity programs)
- patient-initiated access to appropriate advice and support.^{244,247}

Following the first report in 1995 of Rich and colleagues' landmark randomised controlled study of a nurse-led, multidisciplinary intervention that demonstrated beneficial effects regarding rates of hospital readmission, quality of life and cost of care within 90 days of discharge among 282 'high risk' patients with CHF,⁸³ there have been more than 30 randomised studies of similar interventions involving about 5000 subjects. These include a series of Australian studies that reported, for the first time, the potential for these programs to reduce readmissions and prolong survival in high-risk patients with CHF.²⁴⁸ They also described the sustained cost – benefits of early intervention.⁸⁹

A series of increasingly powerful meta-analyses^{90,249–251} provide Level 1 evidence that the application of

multidisciplinary programs of care to older patients with CHF following acute hospitalisation significantly reduces subsequent morbidity and mortality, while improving quality of life and providing large cost savings.

Table 13.1 shows the impact of the most common forms of specialist management programs. In addition to the typical features listed above, these programs often involve a key coordinating role for a CHF nurse and a specialised multidisciplinary team that supports the role of the GP and other key health professionals via a series of community (home-based) or outpatient (specialist CHF clinic) visits.²⁴⁹

Practice point

Multidisciplinary programs of care targeting high-risk CHF patients following acute hospitalisation prolong survival, improve quality of life, and are cost effective in reducing recurrent hospital stays.

Table 13.1

Impact of multidisciplinary interventions on all-cause mortality, all-cause readmission and CHF readmission rates

	All-cause mortality	All-cause readmission	CHF-related readmission
	Risk ratio (95% CI)		
Multidisciplinary CHF clinic (7 RCTs)	0.66 (0.42–1.05)	0.81 (0.76–1.01)	0.76 (0.58–0.99)
Multidisciplinary CHF intervention in the community (8 RCTs)	0.81 (0.65–1.01)	0.81 (0.72–0.91)	0.72 (0.59–0.87)
Combined effect (15 RCTs in total)	0.75 (0.59–0.96)	0.81 (0.71–0.92)	0.74 (0.63–0.87)

CI = confidence interval

RCT = randomised controlled trial

Compared to treatment with ACEIs, where the number needed to treat (NNT) to reduce mortality and CHF admissions are 19 and 16 respectively,²⁵² these programs of care compare very favourably; the equivalent NNTs being 17 to reduce mortality and 10 to reduce admissions.²⁴⁹

Based on a model of CHF management in Glasgow, Scotland,²⁵³ a recent economic analysis of these programs of care in the United Kingdom demonstrated the potential cost efficiencies of applying this type of intervention within a whole healthcare system.²⁵⁴ In this context, the first phase of the New South Wales Chronic Care Program, which enrolled 42,000 patients with a diagnosis of CHF, more than 56,000 bed days and 6500 emergency department presentations have been avoided. A steady decline in unplanned admissions for CHF has been documented in the face of increasing incidence. These gains have been achieved by the recruitment of more than 200 full-time equivalent staff — predominantly nurses and allied health workers — across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas.²⁵⁵ The introduction of a state-based Clinical Service Framework identifies key performance indicators for Area Health Services in relation to CHF management.²⁵⁶



14

Palliative support

Quality of life for patients with severe CHF, refractory to optimal pharmacological and non-pharmacological strategies, can be poor and comparable to that of patients with terminal malignancies.²⁵⁷⁻²⁵⁹ Survival rates are as poor as in the most common form of cancer, with a case-fatality rate of 75% over 5 years overall.⁴⁵

Although palliative care is typically offered to patients with terminal malignancies or degenerative neurological disorders, it is clear that many of those with 'terminal' CHF would also benefit from a palliative approach. For example, patients presenting with NYHA Class IV symptoms typically exhibit anorexia, cachexia, fatigue, depression and sleep disturbance in addition to a very poor prognosis.²⁶⁰ In such situations, the primary treatment goal should be optimisation of quality end of life.

Palliative strategies build upon, rather than replace, multidisciplinary programs of care that optimise CHF management. Additionally, they can cut the overall cost of care by reducing the amount of time patients spend in acute-care settings.²⁶¹

Palliative care is interdisciplinary and is best delivered by coordinated medical, nursing, allied health, community and social services which strive to integrate the medical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects within a holistic framework. This framework should also include the family and be able to provide them support during the terminal phase of a patient's illness.

Palliative care should be considered for patients with the strong possibility of death within 12 months and who have advanced symptoms (i.e. NYHA Class IV) and poor quality of life, resistant to optimal pharmacological and non-pharmacological therapies.²⁶²⁻²⁶⁴ Strong markers of impending mortality include:²⁶⁵⁻²⁶⁸

- advanced age
- recurrent hospitalisation for decompensated heart failure and/or a related diagnosis
- NYHA Class IV symptoms
- poor renal function
- cardiac cachexia
- low sodium concentration
- refractory hypotension necessitating withdrawal of medical therapy.

Ideally, the decision to alter the focus of management from one of clinical improvement to palliation should be taken in consultation with the patient's GP, a cardiologist or specialist physician and a palliative care specialist, having carefully considered all available

treatment options. A program of care individualised to the needs of the patient and their family is extremely important.

Practice point

An **individualised** program of palliative care should be considered for patients facing the strong possibility of death within 12 months and who have advanced symptoms (i.e. NYHA Class IV) and poor quality of life, resistant to optimal pharmacological and non-pharmacological therapies.

14.1 Clarifying goals of treatment

Once a decision to switch to palliative care has been made, patients and their families may require assistance in negotiating the change in goals of care from prolongation of life to improvement of quality of life by maximising comfort and dignity.

Treating doctors should discuss with patients the level of intervention appropriate and/or desirable during this phase, so that unwanted, traumatic interventions are prevented in the last few days of life.²⁶⁰ Naturally, both patients and their families/carers may need significant emotional support during this process.

'Advanced care directives' is a term encompassing documents such as living wills and the authority for a healthcare power of attorney.^{269,270} They offer a mechanism for promoting patient autonomy and can serve to reduce the burden on carers and families at the time of death. Most state governments in Australia have guidelines on their websites for developing advanced care directives.

14.2 Implantable defibrillators

In some instances, palliative management may include deactivation of an ICD. This is done when the extent of deterioration of heart failure symptoms is such that there is a potential for the device to increase distress without a meaningful impact on prognosis.²⁷¹ Clearly, this decision involves potentially far-reaching ethical implications. As such, all relevant issues should be discussed with the patient, the GP and family with appropriate counselling support. Any decision and rationale in this regard should be clearly documented.

The help of the palliative care specialist can be invaluable at this time.

14.3 Symptom control

Most pharmacological agents used in the management of CHF not only confer a survival benefit, but also improve symptoms. As a consequence, the decision to undertake a palliative approach often results in increasing complexity — rather than simplification — of pharmacological therapy. For example, a decision to stop ACEIs and beta-blockers should be made on the basis of intolerance, rather than the aim of treatment. A palliative strategy largely involves targeted symptom relief and management of psychological and social issues.

Dyspnoea

Dyspnoea is a common symptom, affecting approximately 65% of people with CHF. It may be mediated by numerous pathophysiological mechanisms,²⁷² including:

- afferent signals from ventilatory muscles and mechano-receptors in the upper airways, bronchi, epithelium or alveolar walls
- hypercapnia and hypoxia (via chemoreceptors).

Therefore, patients may have no dyspnoea, even when hypoxic/hypercapnic, or conversely, may be very dyspnoeic without either.

The goal of palliation is to improve the patient's subjective sensations, rather than correct abnormal parameters.

These (often debilitating) symptoms at the end-of-life include:

- sleep disturbance
- pain and discomfort
- constipation
- delirium and confusion
- altered affect.^{258,273}

They can be palliated by various approaches, such as those outlined below.

Oxygen

The use of oxygen may reverse hypoxia and allow increased physical activity. The cost of home oxygen is a concern for patients with financial constraints. As there may be a significant placebo response, it is important to determine if the patient requires oxygen continuously, or only during exacerbations of their symptoms.

Benzodiazepines

These are given regularly to relieve the anxiety associated with dyspnoea. Benzodiazepines can also be used to manage panic attacks arising from the anxiety–dyspnoea cycle.

Opioids

It is thought that opioids improve dyspnoea by increasing patients' physical activity tolerance, resulting in lowered ventilation requirements and lowered perception of breathlessness for a given workload.²⁷⁴ Opioid dosage should be adjusted according to symptomatic response. The optimum route of administration and dose regimen remains unclear.^{273,275} Frequent bolus doses may be more effective than slow-release formulations or continuous infusions.²⁷⁶ The role of nebulised opioids also remains unclear.^{277–280}

Parenteral diuretics

If the patient is unable to take diuretics orally and intravenous access is unavailable, these may be given subcutaneously or intramuscularly.

Other measures

Advice on posture, relaxation techniques and having a flow of air across the face (from a fan or an open window) may all provide comfort. The beneficial effect of a flow of air is thought to be due to the action of inhibitory fibres from facial receptors.²⁷²

Uraemia

Rather than develop dyspnoea, patients sometimes choose to continue with diuretics and/or other medications, knowing that this will result in progressive renal impairment. The resulting uraemic nausea, mediated via the chemoreceptor trigger zone, can be palliated using a subcutaneous infusion of haloperidol or another anti-emetic. Uraemic itch may respond to steroids, and agitated delirium may be treated with neuroleptics, such as haloperidol.

Morphine-metabolite accumulation occurs in patients with renal impairment, resulting in clinical features of neuroexcitation, such as agitated delirium and frequent myoclonus.^{281–283} Opioids with less evidence of this phenomenon,²⁸⁴ such as fentanyl, should therefore be considered.²⁷⁵

Lower limb oedema

Severe lower limb oedema is associated with a serous exudate, requiring good nursing care to prevent trauma to the skin. Elevation of the lower limbs when resting or sleeping can improve the degree of oedema to a limited extent. Pressure stockings may also be used to prevent or reduce lower limb oedema.

Inotropes

The use of inotropes in palliative care is controversial, as some palliative care specialists regard this therapy as contradictory to its goals: palliation does not specifically endeavour to hasten or postpone death. These agents do not prolong life, as the potential for arrhythmic events is much increased in palliation. However, as a continuous infusion, inotropes can relieve severe and refractory congestion and improve symptoms. These agents can be infused parenterally via long-term access lines and portable pumps. This

will add to the requirement for specialised nursing care, as these pumps generally need refilling daily. It is not recommended that this therapy should play a central role in end-stage CHF. However, in carefully selected patients, this therapy can provide an improved quality of life without changing the expected outcome of death.

Cardiac cachexia

Cachexia should be managed with an unrestricted caloric intake, frequent small meals and dietary supplements (e.g. protein milks).

Pain and other somatic symptoms

Data from observational studies reveal that people with CHF experience similar somatic symptoms at the end of life. Therefore, application of endorsed pain management strategies should be considered.

Anaemia

Anaemia secondary to iron deficiency or advanced renal dysfunction can markedly exacerbate symptoms and increase the risk of death. Patients' haemoglobin levels should be monitored closely, and anaemia investigated and appropriately treated (e.g. with iron supplements or, in some cases, erythropoietin therapy).²⁸⁵

14.4 Community palliative support

Many patients and their carers are unaware of the possibility of receiving palliative care at home and, when informed of these services, some prefer to die at home. Some of these services also provide counsellors who can give emotional support to patients and carers during the terminal phase, as well as bereavement support to carers.²⁸⁶⁻²⁸⁸

14.5 Support agencies and services

Cardiomyopathy Association of Australia Ltd

The aims of this association are to:

- provide the opportunity for individuals and their families to share their experiences and to support one another
- provide accurate and up-to-date information about cardiomyopathy to members, their families and the medical profession
- increase public awareness of cardiomyopathy
- foster medical research in this area.

The Cardiomyopathy Association of Australia Ltd has contact people in most states. For details of your nearest contact person, please phone **Heartline** on **1300 36 27 87**.

Heart Support Australia

The aims of this organisation are to:

- provide free-of-charge peer support, lay counselling and other support assistance to persons with any form of heart condition, their carers and their families
- support medical and health professionals in providing local and national rehabilitation and education programs for such persons to ensure their physical, psychological and social wellness, so that they may attain their optimum potential
- encourage members and clients in such a manner that they are motivated to comply with the advice of their consulting medical and health professionals, and to engage in any other work or program which will benefit Heart Support Australia, its members, clients and the general public.

For details of your nearest Heart Support Australia group please phone **Heartline** on **1300 36 27 87**.

Hospitals

Some metropolitan and regional hospitals have CHF clinics or specialist services for CHF patients. Contact your local hospital for details of any services near you.

Practice point

Palliative care should only be considered when progressive symptoms prove to be refractory to optimal treatment.

Treating doctors should discuss with their patients the level of intervention appropriate and/or desirable during this phase of their illness, so that unwanted, traumatic interventions are prevented in the last few days of life. Both the patient and their family and carers may need significant emotional support during this process.

15

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Appendix I

NHMRC levels of evidence for clinical interventions and grades of recommendation

Level of evidence*	Study design	Grade of recommendation**	Description
I	Evidence obtained from a systematic review of all relevant RCTs.	A	Rich body of high-quality RCT data.
II	Evidence obtained from at least one properly designed RCT.	B	Limited body of RCT data or high-quality non-RCT data.
III-1	Evidence obtained from well-designed pseudo-RCTs (alternate allocation or some other method).	C	Limited evidence.
III-2	Evidence obtained from comparative studies with concurrent controls and allocation not randomised (cohort studies), case-control studies, or interrupted time series with a control group.	D	No evidence available — panel consensus judgement.
III-3	Evidence obtained from comparative studies with historical control, two or more single-arm studies, or interrupted time series without a parallel control group.		
IV	Evidence obtained from case series, either post-test or pre-test and post-test.		

RCT = randomised controlled trial

* National Health and Medical Research Council. *A guide to the development, implementation and evaluation of clinical practice guidelines*. Canberra: NHMRC, 1999.

** Adapted from US National Institutes of Health. *Clinical guidelines on the identification, evaluation and treatment of overweight and obesity in adults: executive summary*. Expert Panel on the identification, evaluation and treatment of overweight in adults. *Am J Clin Nutr* 1998;68:899–917.



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Appendix II

2006 Guidelines contributors

Key contributors

Executive writers

Prof Henry Krum (Co-chair)
 A/Prof Michael Jelinek (Co-chair)
 Prof Simon Stewart
 Prof Andrew Sindone
 A/Prof John Atherton
 Dr Anna Hawkes (Executive Officer)

Core writers

1 Scope and objectives	A/Prof David Hare Prof Simon Stewart	11 Heart failure with preserved systolic function	A/Prof Michael Jelinek A/Prof Louise Burrell Dr Michael Feneley Dr Philip Mottram
2 Comment on definition of chronic heart failure	A/Prof David Hare Prof Simon Stewart	12 Treatment of associated disorders	Prof Richard Gilbert Prof Carol Pollock Prof John Horowitz Prof John Kalman Prof Henry Krum
3 Aetiology	Prof Henry Krum	13 Post-discharge management programs	Prof Simon Stewart A/Prof Patricia Davidson Dr Deborah Meyers
4 Diagnosis	A/Prof John Atherton A/Prof Ann Keogh Prof Michael Feneley	14 Palliative support	Prof Simon Stewart A/Prof Patricia Davidson Dr Deborah Meyers
5 Supporting patients	Prof Simon Stewart	Appendix III: Epidemiology and public health significance	Prof Simon Stewart Dr Warren Walsh A/Prof Duncan Campbell Dr Rob Doughty
6 Non-pharmacological management	Prof Andrew Sindone Dr Alan Goble Prof Simon Stewart	Appendix IV: Pathophysiology	Prof David Kaye Dr Tom Marwick
7 Pharmacological therapy	Prof Henry Krum Dr John Amerena	Management flowcharts	A/Prof Peter MacDonald
8 Devices	A/Prof Ann Keogh Dr James Leitch Prof John Kalman Dr David O'Donnell		
9 Surgery	A/Prof John Atherton Prof Donald Esmore Dr Robert Larbalestier Dr Andrew Galbraith		
10 Acute exacerbations of chronic heart failure	Prof Andrew Sindone Dr John Beltrame Dr Carmine DePasquale		

Other contributors

Individual reviewers

Dr Peter Bergin
 Prof James Dunbar
 Ms Di Holst
 Dr David Hunt
 Prof Paddy Phillips
 Prof Leon Piterman
 Prof Julian Smith
 Prof Andrew Tonkin

Review organisations and nominated representative

American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association (ACC/AHA)	Dr Mariell Jessup	Kidney Health Australia	Dr Tim Mathew
Australian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association (ACRA)	Ms Libby Birchmore	National Blood Pressure and Vascular Disease Advisory Group (NHFA)	Prof Anthony Dart A/Prof Karen Duggan
Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)	Dr Leslie Bolitho	National Heart Foundation of Australia (NHFA)	Dr Tom Briffa Dr Andrew Boyden Ms Eleanor Clune Ms Rachelle Foreman Dr Nancy Huang
Cardiac Society Australia and New Zealand (CSANZ)	A/Prof Michael Jelinek Dr Gerry O'Driscoll	National Institute of Clinical Studies (NICS)	Prof Geoffrey Tofler Dr Susan Phillips
Cardiomyopathy Association of Australia (CMAA)	Ms Helen Chalk	National Prescribing Service (NPS)	Mr Kwong Ng
Diabetes Australia	Prof Tim Davis	Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)	Prof Mark Harris
Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA)	Mr Graham Hall	Royal Australian College of Physicians (RACP)	Prof Terry Campbell
European Society of Cardiology (ESC)	Prof Karl Swedberg	Royal College of Nursing, Australia (RCNA)	Mrs Patricia O'Hara
Heart Support Australia	Mr Richard McCluskey		
Internal Medicine Society of Australia and New Zealand (IMSANZ)	A/Prof Ian Scott		



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Appendix III

Epidemiology and public health significance

Data on the epidemiology and public health significance of CHF in Australia are limited compared to other developed countries. Current estimates rely largely on information derived from large-scale population cohort studies undertaken in Europe and the United States.¹³

In the past, studies such as the Framingham cohort in the United States^{289,290} relied upon clinical criteria to determine the incidence and prevalence of CHF in the whole population. More recently, there has been an increasing focus on differentiating between the syndrome of CHF, associated with either impaired or preserved (so-called diastolic heart failure) LV systolic function, based on large-scale screening with echocardiography.^{291,292} From these studies, it has also been recognised that there are many individuals who have asymptomatic LV systolic dysfunction. At present there is much interest in using biological markers, such as plasma BNP, as convenient screening tools for further investigation of CHF in the primary care setting.²⁹³

Incidence and prevalence

In a UK population study the annual incidence of CHF was estimated to be 1.85 per 1000 population.²⁹⁴ More recent reports of the Framingham study and other large population cohorts suggest that the incidence has declined slightly in recent years.^{290,295}

Based on international estimates¹³ and Australian data,^{14,296,297} the annual prevalence of CHF within the Australian population is approximately 300,000 (estimates range from 1.5% to 2.0% of the population).

Although rare in those aged less than 45 years, the prevalence of CHF among Australians aged 65 years or more is at least 10%. While more younger men are affected by CHF associated with impaired LV systolic dysfunction, more older women are affected by other forms of CHF (e.g. hypertensive heart disease with associated 'preserved' LV function — see [Section 11](#), Heart failure with preserved systolic function).¹¹

Morbidity

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported in 2000/2001 a total of 41,000 hospital separations where CHF was listed as the primary diagnosis.²⁹⁸ Based on more comprehensive national data sets (with linked individual morbidity and mortality data), a number of studies have quantified the burden imposed by CHF on healthcare systems in Europe^{299,300} and North America.^{301,302} These data suggest that, despite some slowing in the population rate of CHF-related admissions, the age of hospitalised individuals is

steadily growing, and overall numbers of admissions with a diagnosis of CHF continue to rise³⁰³ — albeit at a lower rate than previously predicted.³ Based on extrapolations of these data it has been suggested that in the year 2000:

- there were more than 20,000 new admissions for CHF
- CHF was associated with a total of 100,000 hospital separations
- CHF contributed to 1.4 million days of hospital stay⁴⁸
- at the individual level, quality of life for patients is often worse than for most other common chronic diseases and terminal cancer.⁴⁶

From a primary care perspective, CHF raises a complexity of issues relating to its detection and optimal management, and is a common reason for GP consultations. Overall, cardiovascular disease accounts for 11% of GP contacts, CHF being a major contributor to this healthcare component.³⁰⁴

Practice point

A recent survey of 341 Australian GPs estimated that for every 100 patients aged 60 years and over, 11 had known CHF, and two could be newly diagnosed based on clinical features and known aetiological factors.²⁹⁶

Mortality

Although population survival rates in CHF have been improving,^{2,305,306} CHF is often associated with a worse prognosis than many common forms of malignancy in both sexes.⁴⁵ It also contributes to more life-years prematurely lost by women than the majority of female malignancies combined (other than breast cancer, where fewer, but younger, women are affected).⁴⁵

Five-year survival in those affected by CHF continues to range from 50% to 75%, depending on the timing and point of diagnosis (i.e. community versus hospital).¹³ The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that there are approximately 3000 deaths in this country attributable to CHF each year.³ However, the statistics are distorted by sudden cardiac deaths not directly attributed to CHF. Based on more comprehensive international data,¹³ it has been estimated that the number of CHF-related deaths is likely to be 10-fold those official figures suggest.⁴⁸

Economic burden

Chronic cardiovascular disease contributes to more than \$5 billion per annum in healthcare costs in Australia.³⁰⁷ Although CHF is a major component of such expenditure, there are limited data relating to its exact share of this burden.³⁰⁷ In 1993–94, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimated CHF accounted for the following costs:

- \$411 million of healthcare costs (representing 0.4% of total healthcare costs)
- \$140 million per annum in hospitalisation costs
- \$135 million per annum for nursing home costs.³⁰⁸

Based on data from at least six other developed countries, this was a likely under-estimate.¹³ For example, CHF is reported to directly consume approximately 1.5–2% of total healthcare costs, hospital admissions being the greatest single component (around 70%).³⁰⁹ A more recent analysis suggests that CHF contributes to more than \$1 billion in healthcare expenditure per annum in Australia.⁴⁸

Future burden

Consistent with a contemporary study in Scotland, which predicted a ‘sustained epidemic of CHF’ increasing by 20–30% over the next two decades,²⁹⁷ the burden associated with CHF within the Australian population is expected to increase³¹⁰ due to a number of factors, including:

- the progressive ageing of the Australian population
- the projected increase in the number of elderly people with CHD and hypertension
- increasing prevalence of obesity and metabolic syndromes
- more prolonged survival in those with CHF
- decreased case-fatality associated with acute coronary syndromes
- improved diagnosis of CHF because of greater utilisation of sensitive (e.g. echocardiography) and convenient techniques (e.g. BNP assays) to improve screening and overall detection.¹³

CHF is, therefore, a substantive healthcare problem affecting many Australians, and imposes a large and sustained burden on the healthcare system.

18.1 Prevention of CHF

Risk factors

Large population studies such as Framingham have identified risk factors for the development of CHF.³¹¹ Hypertension and MI account for about three-quarters of the total risk of CHF. Elevated systolic or diastolic blood pressure is a major risk factor, especially in older populations. In the Framingham study there was a two-fold increase in the risk of CHF in patients with systolic

blood pressure >160 mmHg and diastolic blood pressure >90 mmHg.

Effective drug therapy for hypertension has been shown to significantly reduce the likelihood of developing CHF. Many patients will require the use of more than one medication; those that are most useful in the treatment of both hypertension and heart failure are preferred (e.g. ACEIs, angiotensin II receptor antagonists, beta-blockers and diuretics). Long-term studies have also shown that both obesity³¹² and diabetes^{313,314} independently increase the risk significantly of developing CHF in patients without known CHD.

These long-term population studies have also identified risk factors for MI: smoking, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, elevated lipids and physical inactivity.³¹⁵ Using a combination of these factors, an absolute 5-year or 10-year individual risk of CHD can be calculated. While those patients at high risk (e.g. greater than 20% over 10 years) can be readily identified, the majority of MIs occur in the much larger pool of people at intermediate risk, with only one major risk factor.³¹³ Although most of the patients at intermediate risk do not experience a cardiac event until they are at an older age, lifestyle modifications are important in reducing cardiovascular risk.³¹⁶

A number of measures may be taken to reduce the risk of developing CHF. They are listed below.

Smoking cessation, avoidance of passive smoking

- Strongly encourage the patient and family to stop smoking.
- Consider referral to a smoking-cessation program.
- Consider pharmacological therapy for patients smoking more than 10 cigarettes a day, nicotine replacement therapy being the first-line choice of medication.

Nutrition

- Advise the patient to enjoy healthy eating.
- Encourage the patient to choose mainly plant-based foods (e.g. vegetables, fruits and grain-based foods), with moderate amounts of lean meats, poultry and fish and reduced-fat dairy products.
- Advise the patient to consume moderate amounts of polyunsaturated or monounsaturated oils/fats.

Physical activity

- Advise the patient to establish and/or maintain at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on five or more days of the week.

Weight reduction

- Assess and monitor waist circumference and body mass index (BMI).



- Weight reduction goal is a waist measurement <94 cm for men, <80 cm for women, and a BMI <25 kg/m².

Lipids

- Patients should receive healthy eating advice.
- Patients with CHD and/or diabetes, stroke or peripheral vascular disease should receive a statin.
- Lipid goals are a plasma total cholesterol <4 mmol/L, LDL cholesterol <2.5 mmol/L, HDL cholesterol >1.0 mmol/L, triglycerides <2 mmol/L.

The potential benefit of statin therapy in preventing CHF is suggested by retrospective analysis of the large lipid-lowering trials.³¹⁷ In the 4S study with simvastatin, a 20% reduction in the risk of CHF occurred in patients with known CHD but without a previous history of CHF.¹³¹ Continuing clinical trials will provide definitive answers as to the role of statin therapy in the prevention of CHF.

Blood pressure

Consider a diagnosis of hypertension if the patient's systolic blood pressure is ≥140 mmHg, or diastolic blood pressure is ≥90 mmHg.

Blood pressure goals for adults :

- >65 years without diabetes or proteinuria: <140/90 mmHg
- with proteinuria >1 g/day: <125/75 mmHg
- with proteinuria 2.5–1 g/day: <130/80 mmHg
- <65 years with renal failure and/or diabetes and proteinuria <0.25 g/day: <130/85mmHg

Diabetes

Screen for diabetes, measure fasting glucose, confirm diagnosis of type 2 diabetes and aim for HbA_{1c} concentration ≤7%.

Salt intake

Advise patients to use foods with reduced salt or no added salt, and not to add salt to food at the table or in cooking.

While efforts should be made to modify behaviour and treat at-risk individuals by managing their risk factors, a greater impact on risk of heart failure is likely to be made with a public health approach, using a broad range of community and government initiatives to promote physical activity, intake of healthy food and strengthening tobacco control and other measures.³¹⁸

Prevention of LV dysfunction

Patients with known atherosclerotic disease without LV dysfunction are also at increased risk of developing CHF. Studies have shown that these patients benefit from treatment with ACEIs, which significantly reduces the likelihood of developing CHF, independent of whether they develop an MI or not.³¹⁹ There are no published data available on the ability of beta-blockers

to prevent the development of CHF in patients at high vascular risk without LV dysfunction.

Certain therapeutic and recreational agents can also be toxic to myocardium, resulting in cardiomyopathy and CHF. Avoidance of chronic high alcohol intake and avoidance of cocaine or other illicit drugs can prevent CHF in predisposed individuals. The toxic effects of some cancer chemotherapy agents, such as anthracycline and trastuzumab, can be avoided by minimising the total dose, using alternative drugs and avoiding the use of potentially toxic drugs in combination.³²⁰ Other less common causes which, if left untreated, can lead to CHF are thyroid disorders and prolonged tachycardia (e.g. due to atrial fibrillation). Every effort should be made to suppress or control tachyarrhythmias, which are often an unrecognised cause of cardiomyopathy in otherwise normal individuals.

18.2 Comments on screening 'at-risk' individuals for CHF

Given the difficulty in defining CHF, there has been a general reluctance to tackle large-scale population screening for this syndrome. Regardless of the merits of 'indiscriminate' screening, there is increasing interest in developing better ways to screen individuals at risk of developing CHF in order to apply early preventive measures (outlined in [Section 18.1](#)).

All individuals at high risk should be considered for further investigation for CHF. The risk factors are listed in [Table 18.1](#); the main risk factor is age. The lifetime risk is 20% for men and women, and at least 10% of people over the age of 65 years have CHF.^{291,311,321} As many as half of those individuals with CHF living in the community remain undiagnosed.²⁹¹ For example, the CASE Study of CHF in primary care found that two of every 100 Australian patients aged ≥60 years being managed by a GP had previously unrecognised CHF. Detection involved use of a simple clinical algorithm and appropriate diagnostic tests.³²² Those individuals at particular risk of developing CHF are listed in [Table 18.1](#).

Targeted screening for CHF

Based on current evidence, the following patient groups should be carefully considered for further investigation for CHF:

- individuals with two or more risk factors (including advanced age) for CHF outlined in [Table 18.1](#)
- individuals with one or more of the signs and symptoms typically associated with CHF (i.e. dyspnoea, fatigue, oedema and physical activity intolerance)
- individuals over the age of 60 years should be routinely assessed to identify potential signs and symptoms indicative of underlying CHF.

Table 18.1
Clinical risk factors for CHF

Advanced age (>60 years)
Low physical activity
Cigarette smoking
Overweight
Hypertension
Diabetes
Valvular heart disease
Coronary artery disease
LV hypertrophy
Family history of cardiomyopathy
Atrial fibrillation

Adapted from Levy et al, 1996¹¹ and He et al, 2001³¹⁴

Does echocardiography have a role in screening for CHF in asymptomatic individuals?

Echocardiography has an essential role in the following circumstances:

- the initial assessment of patients who are suspected of having CHF based on typical signs and symptoms
- combined with a series of parallel investigations to identify the specific form of CHF involved.

It does **not** have a role in the screening of asymptomatic individuals for whom there is no suspicion of CHF, or other cardiac pathology. Prospective studies show most new cases of CHF have normal systolic and diastolic function at the outset.³²³

Note that echocardiographic evidence of either systolic or diastolic cardiac dysfunction is an independent risk factor for development of CHF and cardiac death,^{217,323,324} and an indication for preventive therapy.

Does plasma BNP measurement have a role in screening for CHF in asymptomatic individuals?

BNP is synthesised as a large molecular weight precursor that is cleaved to release BNP and its amino-terminal extension, NT-proBNP. Depending on the threshold level for diagnosis, plasma BNP and NT-proBNP levels may be elevated in >95% of patients with CHF.^{37,325-327} These peptides may be useful for

the optimisation of CHF therapy.³⁹ They may also be useful for the investigation of patients presenting with acute dyspnoea to determine the presence of acute decompensating heart failure.^{29,30,34} A normal BNP or NT-proBNP makes CHF unlikely, but does not exclude the diagnosis.

However, BNP and NT-proBNP are not useful for screening asymptomatic individuals in whom there is no suspicion of CHF or indeed other cardiac conditions, given that these peptides are also elevated in a much larger proportion of the population without CHF. A community study has found elevated BNP in people at increased risk of death and cardiovascular events including MI, stroke and CHF.³²⁸ Thus, an elevated BNP or NT-proBNP (if available) should, at the very least, encourage more careful attention to the treatment of any associated risk factors (Table 18.1), the use of therapies that may potentially prevent its development (see Table 7.2), and raise the index of suspicion for underlying CHF.

It is important to note that different assays for BNP and NT-proBNP have different performance characteristics. Clinicians should therefore acquaint themselves with the reference range and the diagnostic utility of any test they order. Moreover, the cost implications of BNP and NT-proBNP testing in all the clinical contexts outlined above are yet to be fully elucidated. As such, they may provide the greatest cost-benefits when used to optimise acute and chronic management, as opposed to large-scale screening for CHF.³²⁹

When should a patient be referred to a specialist CHF clinic?

Following initial diagnostic testing, patients with probable CHF should be referred to a specialist clinic for more advanced treatment and assessment of possible reversible causes of CHF. Patients who present a diagnostic challenge, such as obese patients and those with pulmonary disease, should also be referred for specialist assessment and management.

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Appendix IV

Pathophysiology

The pathophysiology of CHF is a vicious cycle — ventricular dysfunction leads to, and is worsened by, neurohormonal activation, myocardial damage, and both peripheral and renal vasoconstriction.³³⁰

19.1 Myocardial pathophysiology

The syndrome of CHF is initiated in the setting of a diverse group of disorders that reduce or alter myocardial performance. In general terms, ventricular impairment may result from:

- conditions that directly impair regional or global cardiac muscle function (e.g. MI, cardiomyopathy)
- conditions that cause pressure overload (e.g. aortic stenosis, chronic hypertension) or volume overload (e.g. mitral regurgitation)
- uncontrolled arrhythmias, both acute and chronic
- diseases involving the pericardium (occasionally).

For each patient, it is important to evaluate fully the underlying aetiology (and duration) of LV dysfunction. A full understanding of the disease process may directly influence therapeutic choice (particularly with respect to myocardial viability) and allow some insight into likely disease progression and prognosis.

In an attempt to categorise the pathophysiological processes that contribute to the symptoms of CHF, it is common to characterise events in terms of impaired systolic function and/or abnormalities of diastolic performance. A number of new ultrasound measures (including tissue Doppler and strain imaging) may improve the understanding of myocardial properties in systolic and diastolic heart failure.

Systolic dysfunction

The failing ventricle is characterised by ventricular dilatation and hypertrophy, with an associated increase in wall stress. This process is initially associated with maintained resting cardiac output, although the response to physical activity is diminished. At the cellular level, milder forms of systolic failure are reflected initially in an inability to contract during stress (such as in response to catecholamines or increased rate). Only at the end stage does myocyte contractility fail substantively.

Extensive research has identified a number of mechanisms that contribute to loss of myocyte contractility. These include:

- alterations in intracellular calcium homeostasis which result from changes in the expression and activity of key proteins, including the sarcoplasmic reticulum Ca^{2+} ATPase and phospholamban
- alterations in the expression and function of adrenergic receptors
- changes in the expression and function of the contractile proteins themselves.

It has been proposed that there may be activation of processes that lead to programmed death (apoptosis) of myocytes, which may account for ongoing loss of contractile elements within the heart.

A number of other mechanisms contribute to overall ventricular failure. In the course of progressive CHF, it is well recognised that the ventricle dilates and assumes a spherical geometry ('remodelling'). The mechanisms that contribute to chamber dilatation are under investigation, but some processes, such as the activation of matrix metalloproteinases (which allows myocytes to slip apart), are already under assessment as potential therapeutic targets.

LV dilatation results in an energetically unfavourable configuration for the heart, and it may also be associated with the development of secondary mitral regurgitation, due to mitral annular enlargement and subsequent failure of mitral leaflet coaptation. Mitral regurgitation and the potential development of atrial arrhythmias may further facilitate CHF development. These changes in ventricular geometry are often accompanied by myocardial fibrosis, which adversely affects chamber stiffness in diastole (as further outlined below).³³¹

Diastolic dysfunction

While recent attempts at classification may have led to the misconception that CHF occurs as a result of either systolic or diastolic heart failure, it is evident that abnormal diastolic function accompanies nearly all forms of the condition. To fully appreciate the contribution of abnormal diastolic function to the syndrome, it is necessary to consider that diastole is influenced by both active and passive ventricular processes.

Cardiomyocyte relaxation is critically dependent upon the sequestration of Ca^{2+} into the sarcoplasmic reticulum, an energy-dependent process. Accordingly, diastolic function is particularly sensitive to ischaemia. Symptoms of diastolic dysfunction relate to alterations in ventricular stiffness. Myocardial fibrosis due to

collagen deposition has been proposed as a key determinant of this property. Further, the specific nature of the cardiomyocyte collagen (such as cross-linked collagen in diabetes) may differentially influence stiffness.³³¹

Account must also be taken of the influence of volume overload, interaction of the left and right ventricle (via the interventricular septum), and the constraining effect of the pericardium on an enlarged heart. Ultimately all of these factors combine to influence the ventricular end diastolic pressure, a key determinant of symptomatic status.

19.2 Neurohormonal activation

In CHF, decreased cardiac output activates many neurohormonal compensatory systems that, in the short term, act to preserve circulatory homeostasis and maintain arterial pressure.³³² However, when operating in chronic excess, these compensatory systems play a role in the development and progression of CHF.

Early compensatory mechanisms include activation of the sympathetic nervous system and the renin–angiotensin system, leading to elevated levels of noradrenaline, angiotensin II and aldosterone.

In advanced CHF, levels of vasopressin and endothelin also rise.^{332,333} Chronic activation of vasoconstrictors contributes to deteriorating cardiac function through increased peripheral resistance and effects on cardiac structure, causing hypertrophy and fibrosis, myocyte necrosis and/or apoptosis, down-regulation of beta-adrenergic receptors and endothelial dysfunction (see **Figure 19.1**).

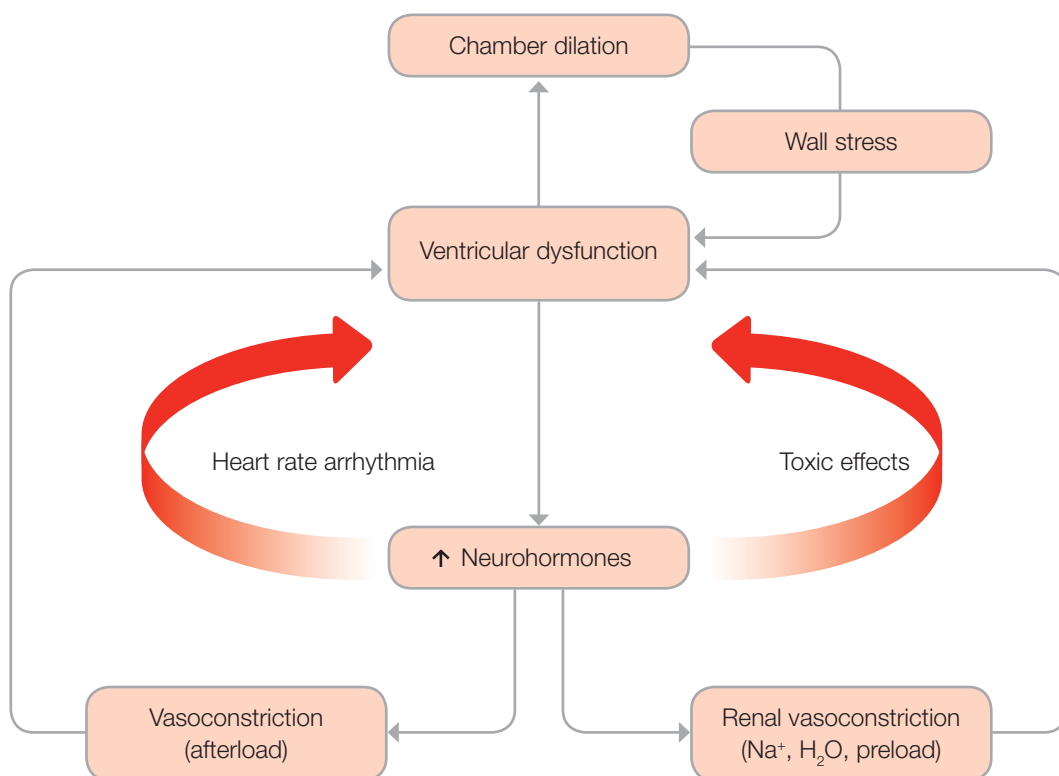
In early CHF, the adverse effects of endogenous vasoconstrictors are balanced by elevated levels of the natriuretic peptides, which cause vasodilation and also inhibit the secretion of noradrenaline, renin and vasopressin. However, in advanced CHF, the actions of vasodilator systems are attenuated, resulting in unopposed systemic and pulmonary vasoconstriction, cardiac hypertrophy and ischaemia, oedema and hyponatraemia.

The clinical importance of activation of neurohormones in CHF is two-fold:

- circulating levels reflect LV function and predict prognosis
- blockade of the actions of angiotensin and noradrenaline slows progression of myocardial dysfunction, alleviates symptoms and reduces morbidity and mortality.

Figure 19.1

The ‘vicious cycle’ of CHF pathophysiology





19.3 Vascular function in CHF

Major alterations in regional blood flow have been consistently observed in CHF. To a large extent, these changes reflect the combined influences of increased vasoconstrictor activity (as outlined previously) and reduced activity of endothelium-dependent vasodilatory processes, most notably the nitric oxide pathway. Structural changes, including vascular wall oedema and reduced vascular density, may also occur.³³⁴

19.4 Skeletal muscle in CHF

While the conventional view is that reduced muscle blood flow is largely responsible for physical activity intolerance, a number of recent studies have identified changes in muscle metabolism that could contribute. Studies using ³¹P NMR spectroscopy have shown rapid depletion of phosphocreatine, increased ADP concentrations and acidification of muscle during physical activity. These changes are independent of blood flow and are probably caused by a reduction in the mitochondrial content of skeletal muscle. Physical activity ameliorates these metabolic changes.

Cardiac cachexia, sometimes a prominent feature of severe CHF, includes loss of muscle mass as well as adipose tissue. Cardiac cachexia may be caused by increased production of tumour necrosis factor-alpha, plasma levels of which are elevated in severe CHF.³³⁵

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Abbreviations

ACEI	angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor	LV	left ventricular
ADP	adenosine diphosphate	LVAD	left ventricular assist device
AF	atrial fibrillation	LVEF	left ventricular ejection fraction
ANP	atrial natriuretic peptide	MET	metabolic equivalent
APO	acute pulmonary oedema	MI	myocardial infarction
AV	atrio-ventricular	MRI	magnetic resonance imaging
BiPAP	bilevel positive airway pressure	NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
BMI	body mass index	NYHA	New York Heart Association
BNP	B-type natriuretic peptide	PaCO ₂	partial pressure of carbon dioxide (arterial)
cAMP-	cyclic adenosine monophosphate	PET	positron emission tomography
CARE-HF	Cardiac Resynchronisation in Heart Failure trial	PND	paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnoea
CASE	Cardiac Awareness Survey and Evaluation study	QRS	QRS complex of electrocardiograph
CHD	coronary heart disease	RCT	randomised controlled trial
CHF	chronic heart failure	RV	right ventricular
COX-2	cyclo-oxygenase-2 enzyme	SOLVD	Studies of Left Ventricular Dysfunction
CPAP	continuous positive airway pressure	TNT	Treating to New Targets
DVT	deep vein thrombosis	VO ₂ max	volume of oxygen consumed per minute at maximal exercise
ECG	electrocardiogram	WASH	Warfarin/Aspirin Study in Heart Failure trial
FEV ₁	forced expiratory volume in 1 minute	WATCH	Warfarin and Antiplatelet Therapy in CHF trial
GP	general practitioner	4S	Scandinavian Simvastatin Survival Study
HFPSF	heart failure with preserved systolic function		
HOPE	Heart Outcomes Prevention Evaluation study		
HPS	Heart Protection Study		
ICD	implantable cardioverter defibrillator		



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Disclosure

Many members of the Writing Panel have received paid honoraria for work performed on behalf of manufacturers of therapies described in these guidelines. However, no members of the Writing Panel stand to gain financially from their involvement in these guidelines and no conflicts of interest exist for Writing Panel members, the National Heart Foundation of Australia or the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand.

Heart Foundation Offices

Australian Capital Territory

15 Denison Street
Deakin
ACT 2600
Phone (02) 6282 5744

New South Wales

Sydney

Level 3, 80 William Street
Sydney
NSW 2011
Phone (02) 9219 2444

Newcastle

Suite 5, OTP House
Bradford Close
Kotara
NSW 2289
Phone (02) 4952 4699

Illawarra

Kiama Hospital and
Community Health Service
Bonaira Street
Kiama
NSW 2533
Phone (02) 4232 0122

Northern Territory

Darwin

Third Floor
Darwin Central Building
21 Knuckey Street
Darwin
NT 0800
Phone (08) 8981 1966

Alice Springs

Shop 1, 9 Parsons Street
Alice Springs
NT 0870
Phone (08) 8953 5942

Queensland

Brisbane

557 Gregory Terrace
Fortitude Valley
QLD 4006
Phone (07) 3872 2500

Central Queensland

6/160 Bolsover Street
Rockhampton
QLD 4700
Phone (07) 4922 2195

North Queensland

Suite 7B
95 Denham Street
Townsville
QLD 4810
Phone (07) 4721 4686

South Australia

155-159 Hutt Street
Adelaide
SA 5000
Phone (08) 8224 2888

Tasmania

Hobart

86 Hampden Road
Battery Point
TAS 7004
Phone (03) 6224 2722

Northern Tasmania

Launceston Community
Health Centre
McHugh Street
Kings Meadows
TAS 7249
Phone (03) 6336 5116

North-West Tasmania

2nd Floor, Room 232
Community and Health
Services Centre
23 Steele Street
Devonport
TAS 7310
Phone (03) 6421 7704

Victoria

411 King Street
West Melbourne
VIC 3003
Phone (03) 9329 8511

Western Australia

334 Rokeby Road
Subiaco
WA 6008
Phone (08) 9388 3343