

The Advanced Heart Failure Center



VAD Decision Guide



Introduction

Heart failure happens when your heart is not able to pump enough blood to meet the demands of your body. Heart failure tends to get worse over time for most people. Severe heart failure can lead to death. Here are some of the most common symptoms - all are signs that it is time to consider advanced heart failure therapies.

Fatigue

Heart failure can severely limit your activity. Advanced heart failure patients may feel increasingly tired, making it difficult to do everyday activities like walking, climbing stairs, carrying groceries or even something as simple as getting dressed.

Shortness of breath

Feeling short of breath is common with advanced heart failure. Fluid can back up into the lungs leaving you feeling winded, even when lying down.

Limited activity

You may find yourself avoiding physical activities like walking the dog, going up stairs or attending social activities. Many people with advanced heart failure often adjust their lifestyle to fit in with their condition.

Other symptoms of advanced heart failure can be:

- Coughing
- Unexplained weight gain
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Edema (leg swelling)

Your heart failure has progressed to the point that your medications are no longer controlling your symptoms. Without changing treatment at this point you could die very shortly. The gold standard for heart failure is a heart transplant. If you are eligible for a heart transplant your doctor will discuss the use of a ventricular assist device (LVAD or VAD) for bridge to transplant (BTT) while you are waiting for a donor organ. A VAD placed when transplant is not an option is called destination therapy (DT).

A VAD may or may not be an option for you. Either way, the choice is yours and we want to provide you with the information necessary to make an informed decision.



What is a VAD?

A VAD (ventricular assist device) is a mechanical pump that is implanted to support the heart's function and blood flow in people with weakened hearts. Placement of the VAD requires open heart surgery.

Driveline

The cord that connects the pump to the outside. This passes through the skin and holds important electrical wires.

Pump

A motor placed inside the chest. It pushes blood from the heart to the body.

Batteries

Power source for the pump. The pump must always be plugged into either batteries or an electrical wall outlet.

Controller

A computer that operates the pump. The controller displays messages and sounds alarms about the device.



What is the VAD process?

- Open heart surgery is required
- Average surgery length is 3-5 hours
- Average hospital stay is 2-3 weeks
- You will not be able to shower until your driveline site heals, approximately 6 weeks
- Required doctor visits every week following discharge for 1-2 months



How will a VAD change my life?

Choosing a VAD is going to change your life in various ways you need to be aware of.

Power Source – From time of VAD implantation you must be connected to a power source at all times. During the night you will need to plug into an electrical outlet. During the day batteries are a good option. Batteries can generally last 6-12 hours, depending.



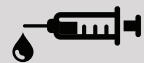
Carrying Equipment – Equipment can be carried on a belt or in a vest. Equipment includes the controller and batteries along with an extra controller and extra batteries just in case.



Driveline Care – Plan on cleaning and changing the bandages for the driveline site (where the cord exits the body) several times a week to avoid major issues.



Medicine – Ongoing doctor visits and taking blood thinners are a must for the rest of your life. Previous medications may still be needed. Generally fewer medications are taken overall once a VAD is implanted.



Water Precautions – Once a VAD is implanted, you must avoid getting directly into water. This includes swimming, bathing and regular showers. Instead, you must use the provided special water protection equipment when you shower.



Cost – This will depend on your insurance coverage. A meeting with a financial advisor will be scheduled to review what your insurance will cover versus what out-of-pocket expenses to expect.



Sex – Changes in your sex life are to be expected; however, generally for most VAD patients sex is safe to resume after surgery recovery.



Emotions – Deciding to get a VAD is a major life change. Along with it, many emotions come into play. For some, adaptability comes easier than for others. Educating yourself with what to expect and how your life will be altered will help immensely.



Additional information for consideration...

A VAD will provide relief of heart failure-related symptoms, but at some point the VAD patient will have to deal with end-of-life issues, whether from heart failure or other medical issues. VAD patients can acquire life-threatening issues that will require the patient and family member to make a decision about turning off the pump. This is a discussion that you and your caregiver need to consider for when that time comes.



What to expect as a caregiver

Getting a VAD is a big decision for a caregiver as well.

We recommend that the patient identify one person that will be the primary caregiver. This person will be responsible for:

- Driving patient to appointments and errands
- Driveline dressing changes
- Assisting with VAD equipment
- Troubleshooting alarms
- Helping with medications

The caregiver will need to be present daily at the hospital to attend the training sessions after VAD placement.

The patient will not be discharged from the hospital until the patient and caregiver are completely trained in VAD care.

Immediately after discharge, the patient will need assistance on a daily basis. This usually decreases over time.

Support Groups

There are support groups available for patients and caregivers. We encourage active participation in support groups after VAD placement for the patient and caregiver. Oklahoma Heart Institute Support Group meets the last Tuesday of every month from 1 - 2 p.m. except May and December.

Resources

www.myLVAD.com

www.heartware.com

www.heartmate.com





Next steps after choosing a VAD

- ✓ Talk with your cardiologist and surgeon about your decision and next steps.
- ✓ Meet with your dentist
Your dental health is important. You need to have a check-up with your dentist to rule out cavities or abscessed teeth. You must be cleared prior to implant. Please have your dentist fax a copy of your office visit to 918-574-9059.
- ✓ Meet with your primary care physician
It is important that your immunizations are up-to-date. Please have your PCP fax records of the following to 918-574-9059:
 - Tetanus
 - Hepatitis
 - Flu
 - Pneumonia
- ✓ If you and your physicians decide that a VAD is the right choice for you, we will meet with you and your caregiver for more education and to discuss your behavioral and financial obligations.
- ✓ If your physicians have any questions, please have them contact:

Advanced Heart Failure Center

(P) 918-574-9003 (F) 918-574-9059

Cardiothoracic/VAD Surgery Office

(P) 918-749-6400

What if I don't choose a VAD?

Palliative Care

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illnesses through the prevention and relief of suffering and treatment of pain and other problems.

Hospice Care

Hospice care is a type of care and philosophy of care that focuses on the palliation, or easing, of a chronically ill, terminally ill, or seriously ill patient's pain and symptoms and attending their emotional and spiritual needs.

* Parts of this guide are courtesy of Medtronic.



Oklahoma Heart Institute

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