

Chronic illnesses, functional limitations a risk in older adults with heart failure

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Heart failure affects more than 6 million people in the U.S.—most of whom are older adults. Roughly half the older adults who have heart failure also live with five or more other chronic health conditions. This group of people may have difficulty performing daily activities, such as walking, bathing, and eating. And older adults who have multiple chronic illnesses plus heart failure generally require more frequent health care, including more visits to healthcare providers and hospitalizations.

Recently, researchers examined the impact of having multiple chronic conditions and having difficulty with [daily activities](#) on the health of [older adults](#) with [heart failure](#). Until now, there's been no research on the combined effects of having all three problems for older adults. The researchers published their findings in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

The researchers sent questionnaires to 6,346 older adults who had been diagnosed with heart failure; 2,692 participants returned the questionnaires and were included in the study.

Of the people with heart failure included in the study:

- 25 percent had no other chronic illnesses or trouble performing daily activities.
- 35 percent had other chronic illnesses.
- 9 percent had trouble performing daily activities.
- 31 percent had other chronic illnesses and trouble performing

daily activities.

The most common non-heart-disease-related chronic conditions the participants reported were diabetes (45 percent), arthritis (40 percent), and cancer (31 percent).

The daily activities that the participants reported having the most difficulty performing/completing were using transportation (37 percent), preparing meals (28 percent), and bathing (23 percent).

The researchers discovered that the participants who had other chronic conditions plus trouble performing their daily activities had the highest risk for death, hospitalizations, and visits to healthcare providers and emergency rooms. They also learned that participants who had either other [chronic conditions](#) or problems performing their daily activities had a similar risk for hospitalization or emergency room visits.

The researchers concluded that, when healthcare providers care for people with heart failure, they should also consider the person's [chronic illnesses](#) and problems with daily activities. The researchers also said that having difficulty performing daily activities could lead to serious consequences for heart failure patients.

More information: Sheila M. Manemann et al, Multimorbidity and Functional Limitation in Individuals with Heart Failure: A Prospective Community Study, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.15336](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.15336)

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