

"Keep It Pumping"

Don't fail your heart, or it may fail you

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We are all familiar with the sound of our own heartbeat, steady as you walk and sleep, fast as you run. When you have heart failure however, your ability to do simple, everyday activities such as walking up stairs is severely affected, having detrimental effects on patients' day-to-day lives¹. The #KeepItPumping campaign, an initiative by Novartis Corporation (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, strives to empower both patients and the public to take an active role in protecting our nation's hearts and break free from the debilitating, limiting symptoms of heart failure.

It is estimated that one in five people over the age of 40 will develop heart failure, a debilitating and potentially life-threatening condition where the heart is not able to pump enough blood around the body due to the weakening of heart muscles over time^{2,3}. This means that your blood cannot deliver enough oxygen and nourishment to your body to allow it to work normally and may cause you to feel tired or fatigued⁴. Symptoms may also include severe breathlessness, swollen ankles, rapid weight gain and difficulty in movement⁵.

Heart failure impacts more than 60 million people worldwide⁶. Studies revealed that the hearts of Malaysians may be at greater risk than other parts of the world compared with Western counterparts⁷. Heart failure in South East Asian patients occurs at a younger age and is characterised by more severe clinical features, with vascular risk factors such as hypertension, obesity and diabetes². Asian patients with stable heart failure have been shown to be at least a decade younger than European patients, often impacting individuals at the peak of their economical productivity.

Together with prescribed medication, exercise is a crucial component of optimal disease management for patients with heart failure, helping to reduce the progression of symptoms and encouraging them to adopt a more active lifestyle⁸. Exercise-based rehabilitation amongst heart failure patients, in conjunction with treatment adherence, has been shown to reduce related hospital admissions, improve patient quality of life and reduce mortality rates in the long term⁹. Furthermore, regular exercise is associated with the reduction of risk factors such as hypertension and obesity which may help to prevent heart failure occurring and protect the hearts of the general population¹⁰.

This year's #KeepItPumping campaign, a group of heart failure rehabilitation patients from the Cardiac Rehabilitation Centre, Universiti Malaya Medical Centre, performed an eye-opening aerobic dance showcase. The patients, each with their own unique journey of heart failure – brought to life the benefits of holistic management, empowering other patients in the knowledge that they too can live a full and normal life.

By enhancing our understanding of heart failure and taking a proactive role in our health, we can all help to protect our nation's hearts. Physical activity can help to reduce your risk of heart failure by decreasing the burden and the severity of associated risk factors¹⁰. Taking small steps towards better heart health will go a long way in making sure your body's most important muscle keeps on pumping.

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