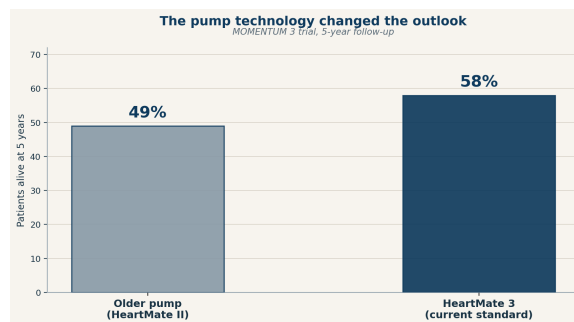


Understanding LVAD (Left Ventricular Assist Device)

A mechanical pump that helps a weak heart move blood

The pump technology changed. So did what people can expect.



Online: <https://go.riasalimd.com/lvad-guide>

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Last Updated: August 2026



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Names & Terms You Will Hear

Term	Meaning
LVAD	Left ventricular assist device. A mechanical pump.
HeartMate 3	The current standard LVAD, the only fully magnetically levitated pump on the market. Its parts do not touch, which is why it damages blood cells less than older designs.
Driveline	The cable that runs from the pump, through the skin of your abdomen, to a controller and batteries you wear outside your body.
Bridge to transplant	Using the LVAD to keep you alive and well while you wait for a donor heart.
Destination therapy	Using the LVAD as the long-term treatment itself, for people who are not transplant candidates.
Continuous-flow pump	The pump spins constantly rather than beating like a heart. This is why some LVAD patients have a very faint or no felt pulse.
INTERMACS	The national registry that tracks outcomes for every implanted LVAD in the United States.

An LVAD works alongside your heart, not instead of it. Your own heart keeps beating. The pump takes over the work your weak left ventricle can no longer do on its own. A very faint pulse afterward is expected, not a sign the device has failed.



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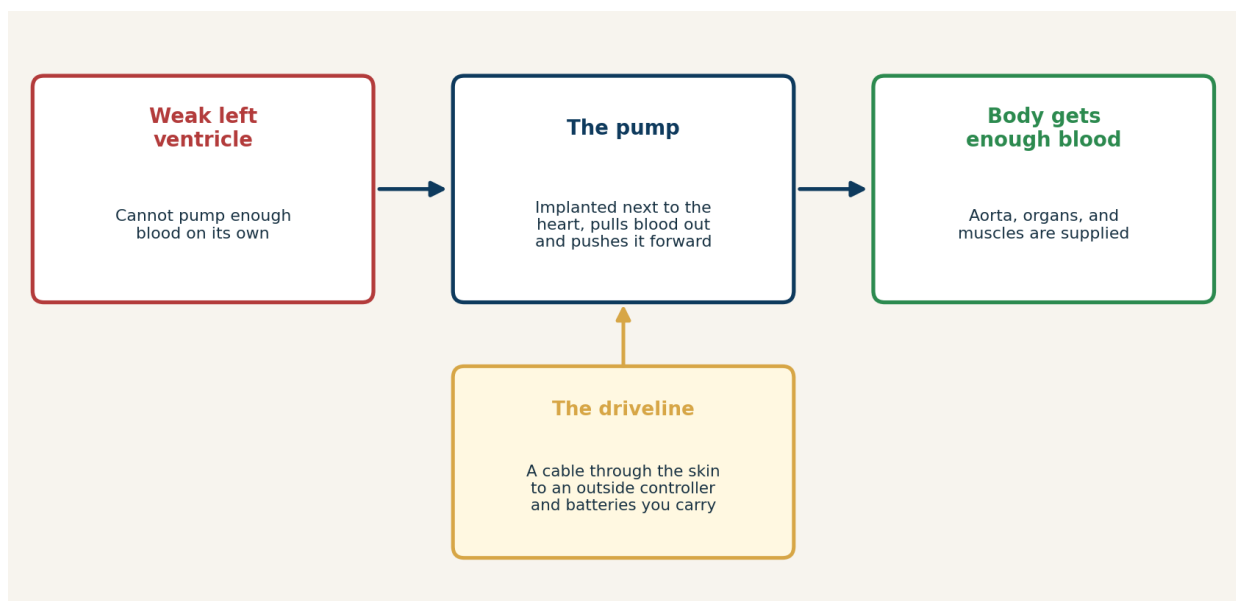
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What Is LVAD (Left Ventricular Assist Device)?

- An LVAD is a mechanical pump. It is implanted next to a heart that is too weak to pump enough blood on its own.
- It does not replace the heart. It works alongside it, pulling blood from the weak left ventricle and pushing it forward into the aorta.
- A cable called the driveline runs from the pump through the skin of your abdomen. It connects to a controller and battery pack you wear outside your body.
- The current standard device, HeartMate 3, spins on a magnetic field with no touching parts. This is a real advance over the pumps used a decade ago.
- An LVAD is used in one of two ways. It can bridge you to a heart transplant, or it can be the long-term treatment itself, called destination therapy.
- Which path is right depends on your age, other health conditions, and whether you are a transplant candidate. This is a decision you make with a heart-failure team, not something decided in one visit.



How an LVAD works. The pump sits beside the weak left ventricle and pushes blood forward into the aorta. The driveline is the cable that connects the internal pump to the external controller and batteries you carry.



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Bridge to Transplant vs Destination Therapy

- Bridge to transplant means the LVAD supports you while you wait for a donor heart. It buys time and lets you stay stronger for the surgery when a match becomes available.
- Destination therapy means the LVAD is the long-term treatment, used for people who are not transplant candidates, whether because of age, other medical conditions, or personal choice.
- In the MOMENTUM 3 trial, about 62% of patients received the pump as destination therapy, so the outcomes described in this guide reflect real long-term use.
- Your path can also change. Someone started as destination therapy can later become a transplant candidate if their situation changes, and this is reassessed over time.
- This decision is made together with your heart-failure team, weighing your heart function, other organs, age, and personal goals.



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Why It Matters

- For advanced heart failure that no longer responds well to medicines, an LVAD can be the difference between severe daily symptoms and a return to real activity.
- The pump technology has improved a great deal. The MOMENTUM 3 trial compared the current HeartMate 3 against the older HeartMate II pump.
- At 5 years, 58% of HeartMate 3 patients were alive, compared with 49% on the older pump.
- The improvement came mainly from fewer clots and strokes. Device thrombosis fell from about 0.108 events per patient-year to about 0.01, and stroke fell from about 0.136 to about 0.05 events per patient-year.
- This was the first prospective randomized LVAD trial to report full 5-year outcomes, so the numbers rest on real, controlled data rather than a single center's experience.
- About 62% of patients in that trial received the pump as destination therapy, so these numbers describe real long-term use, not just a bridge to transplant.

Outcome at 5 years	Older pump (HeartMate II)	Current pump (HeartMate 3)
Alive	49%	58%
Device thrombosis (per patient-year)	0.108	0.01
Stroke (per patient-year)	0.136	0.05



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Risk Factors

Some patients are more likely to develop this condition. Knowing your risk helps your care team take extra precautions.

Risk Factor	Why It Increases Risk
Advanced heart failure not responding to medicines	The core group an LVAD is considered for, once GDMT and other options have been tried and are no longer enough.
Right ventricle weakness	The LVAD supports the left side. A weak right ventricle can struggle to keep up, and this is checked carefully before implant.
Kidney or liver dysfunction from low blood flow	Long-standing heart failure can strain other organs. This is assessed as part of deciding whether you are a good candidate.
Not being a transplant candidate	This does not rule out an LVAD. It usually means destination therapy is the intended path from the start.
A bleeding tendency	LVAD patients need a blood thinner, so an existing bleeding risk is weighed carefully beforehand.
Limited home support	Living with an LVAD means learning driveline care, battery management, and how to respond to alarms. A support system at home matters.



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Treatment Options

- You will take a blood thinner, almost always warfarin, for as long as the pump is in place. Regular INR blood tests are part of life with an LVAD.
- You will learn driveline dressing changes, usually with a nurse first and then on your own, to keep the exit site clean and reduce infection risk.
- You carry the controller and batteries at all times, in a small bag or vest. Spare, fully charged batteries go everywhere with you.
- You will learn what each alarm on the controller means and what to do for each one before you go home.
- Blood pressure is checked differently with a continuous-flow pump, often with a special device rather than a normal cuff, since the pulse can be very faint.
- You will have regular follow-up visits to check the pump's readings and your heart function.
- Showering is possible with the right waterproof covering. Swimming and bathing are not, since the driveline exit site must stay dry.

Living With the Device Day to Day

- The controller and batteries go everywhere with you, carried in a small bag, belt, or vest.
- You will always have a spare, fully charged set of batteries, since the pump cannot run without power.
- Driveline dressing changes are a daily or near-daily task, taught thoroughly before you leave the hospital.
- A special monitor is used for blood pressure, since a continuous-flow pump often produces a very faint pulse that a normal cuff may not read well.
- Showering is possible with a waterproof covering over the driveline exit site. Swimming and bathing are not recommended, since the site must stay dry.
- Most patients can travel with planning. Talk with your LVAD coordinator well ahead of any trip.



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Comfort Measures at Home (No Medication Needed)

These simple steps support healing and ease symptoms. Use them alongside any medication your doctor prescribes.

- Keep spare charged batteries within reach at all times, including overnight.
- Learn the alarm sounds and what each one means before you leave the hospital.
- Keep the driveline site clean and dry, and follow the dressing-change schedule exactly as taught.
- Carry your LVAD identification card and emergency contact information whenever you leave home.
- Avoid activities with a real risk of a blow to the pump site, such as contact sports.
- Ask about travel. Most patients can travel with planning, but it takes advance coordination with your team.

Related guides from our practice.

HFrEF (Reduced Ejection Fraction) and Advanced Heart Failure — the conditions that lead to an LVAD conversation.

Heart Transplant — the other path for advanced heart failure.

CardioMEMS Heart Failure Sensor — another device used earlier in heart failure care.

Warfarin and INR Monitoring — the blood-thinner routine every LVAD patient learns.

Cardiogenic Shock — when an LVAD is used urgently.



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Risks, Benefits, and Alternatives

Every choice has trade-offs. Use this table to start the shared decision conversation.

Option	Risks	Benefits	Alternatives
LVAD (HeartMate 3)	Requires lifelong blood thinning, so bleeding risk. Driveline infection risk. GI bleeding risk that rises over time. A device you carry and maintain daily. Requires a caregiver able to help, especially early on.	58% alive at 5 years, up from 49% with the older pump. Can relieve severe heart failure symptoms and let many patients return to real daily activity. Can serve as a bridge to transplant or as a long-term treatment on its own.	Heart transplant, if you are a candidate and a donor heart becomes available. Continuing to optimize heart failure medicines. Palliative, comfort-focused care for those who decide against a device.
Heart transplant	Requires a donor organ and a wait of uncertain length. Lifelong immunosuppression with its own infection and cancer risks.	The closest option to restoring normal heart function, when it is available and a good match is found.	An LVAD as a bridge while waiting, or as the destination if transplant is not an option.
Continuing on medicines alone	For advanced heart failure that has stopped responding well, symptoms and hospitalizations tend to continue or worsen.	No device, no driveline, no daily maintenance, no blood thinner beyond what heart failure already requires.	An LVAD or transplant evaluation, if symptoms are no longer controlled.
Comfort-focused care	Heart failure symptoms are managed without a device. Life expectancy is not extended in the way an LVAD or transplant can offer.	Avoids surgery, a driveline, and the daily demands of device life. May fit someone's values and goals better than a device.	An LVAD, if the person is a candidate and prefers to pursue every option to extend life and function.



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Common Misconceptions

Myth	Reality
An LVAD replaces the heart.	It does not. Your own heart is still there and still beating. The LVAD works alongside it, taking over the pumping job the weak left ventricle can no longer do well on its own.
Getting an LVAD means I gave up on a transplant.	For many patients an LVAD is used specifically as a bridge to transplant. Whether the goal is transplant or destination therapy is decided with your team based on your candidacy, not something the device itself determines.
I will not have a pulse anymore, so something is wrong.	A very faint or absent pulse is expected with a continuous-flow pump, since it spins rather than beats. This is why blood pressure is checked with a different method. It does not mean the device has failed.
Older LVAD outcomes are what I should expect today.	The technology changed meaningfully. The MOMENTUM 3 trial showed 58% 5-year survival with the current HeartMate 3 pump, up from 49% with the previous generation, driven by far fewer clots and strokes.
Once I have an LVAD, I cannot be active.	Many patients return to walking, light exercise, and much of their normal routine. Contact sports and swimming are out, but daily activity is generally encouraged once you have recovered from surgery.
The driveline site does not need daily attention.	It does. Driveline infection is one of the two complications tracked most closely in national data, and consistent dressing care is the main way to reduce that risk.
GI bleeding on an LVAD is rare.	It is not rare, and it rises over time. National registry data shows it in about 18% of patients at one year and 27% by three years. This is a known trade-off of continuous-flow pump technology, not a sign of a problem specific to you.



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Possible Complications

Knowing what can go wrong helps you spot problems early. Most complications are uncommon, especially with treatment.

Where / What	What Can Happen
Driveline infection	Reported in about 19% of patients by 12 months, with an incidence of roughly 0.16 events per patient-year. Daily dressing care and prompt reporting of redness, drainage, or fever are the main defenses.
Gastrointestinal bleeding	Reported in about 18% of patients at one year, rising to 23% at two years and 27% at three years. It happens because a continuous-flow pump changes how certain blood-clotting proteins work and can promote small abnormal blood vessels in the gut.
Stroke	A serious but far less common risk with the current pump than with older designs, at roughly 0.05 events per patient-year with HeartMate 3, down from about 0.136 with the previous generation.
Pump thrombosis (a clot in the device)	Now uncommon with HeartMate 3, at roughly 0.01 events per patient-year, down sharply from about 0.108 with the older HeartMate II pump.
Right heart failure after implant	The right ventricle can struggle to keep pace with a left side that is now pumping harder. This is assessed carefully before surgery and watched closely afterward.
Device malfunction or alarm	Rare, but every patient is trained on what each alarm means and what to do, including a backup plan if the controller fails.

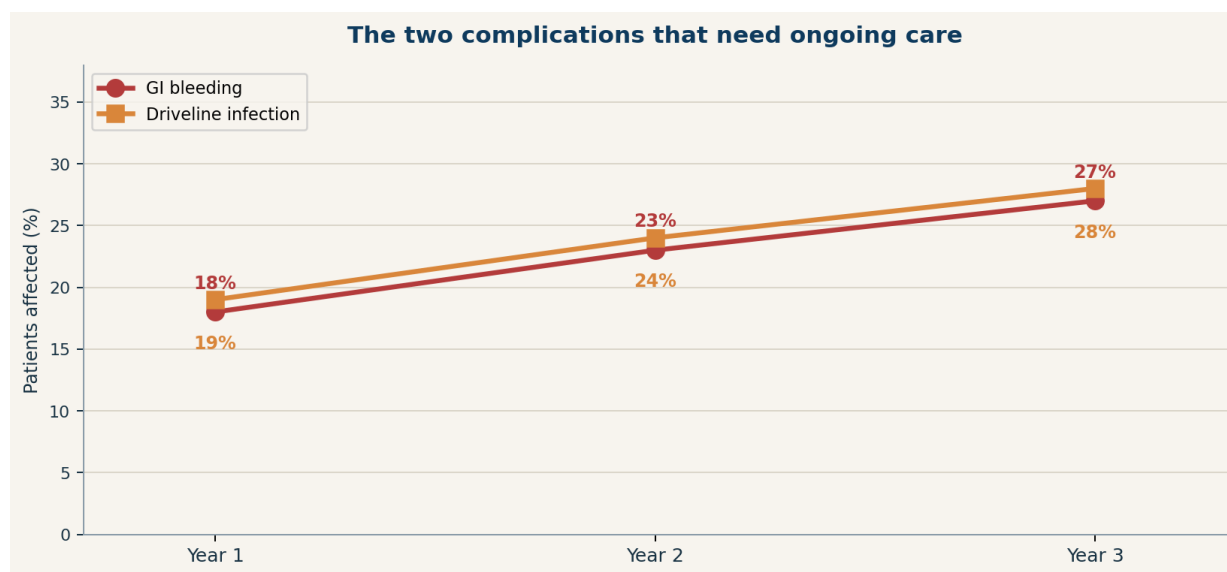


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GI bleeding and driveline infection both rise the longer you have the device, according to national INTERMACS registry data. This is why ongoing driveline care and prompt reporting of bleeding matter for the life of the pump, not just the first few months.



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Points to Know

If you remember nothing else, remember these key points.

- The LVAD works alongside your own heart. It does not replace it.
- You will take a blood thinner for as long as the device is in place, with regular blood tests.
- Driveline care is a daily responsibility. Consistent dressing changes lower infection risk.
- GI bleeding and driveline infection are the two complications tracked most closely, and both are manageable with prompt attention.
- A very faint pulse is expected with a continuous-flow pump, not a sign something is wrong.
- Whether the goal is bridge-to-transplant or destination therapy is a decision made with your heart-failure team based on your situation.
- The current HeartMate 3 pump has meaningfully better 5-year outcomes than the generation before it.
- Always carry spare charged batteries and know your alarm sounds.



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When to Call Us - and When to Call 911

If you are not sure, call. We would rather hear from you twice than miss a real problem.

- Fever, redness, swelling, or drainage at the driveline site. Call us the same day.
- Blood in your stool, black stools, or vomiting blood. Call us right away.
- An alarm you do not recognize or cannot resolve using your training. Call the LVAD coordinator line immediately.
- New or worsening shortness of breath, swelling, or fatigue. Call us the same day.
- Sudden weakness on one side, trouble speaking, or facial drooping. Call 911, since this can be a stroke.
- Chest pain, fainting, or a sense that the pump has stopped working. Call 911.
- Signs of bleeding beyond what is expected on your blood thinner, such as unusual bruising or a nosebleed that will not stop. Call us the same day.
- Before any dental work, surgery, or new medicine. Call us first, since your blood thinner may need adjustment.

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Trusted Resources

The links below are the trusted resources Dr. Ali used to write this guide and that he recommends you visit for more information. Each is a clickable link in the digital version and a Short.io tracked URL on the printed version.

- [American Heart Association — Left Ventricular Assist Devices](#) - Plain-language overview of how an LVAD fits into heart failure treatment.
- [Cleveland Clinic — Left Ventricular Assist Device \(LVAD\)](#) - Patient-facing detail on the device, the driveline, and daily-life adaptations.
- [Mayo Clinic — Ventricular Assist Device](#) - Explains bridge-to-transplant versus destination therapy.



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Sources Used to Build This Guide

Every recommendation in this guide is grounded in one or more of the studies, guidelines, or trusted resources below. Short links are tracked so Dr. Ali can see which references patients are reading; nothing personally identifying is captured.

- [Mehra MR et al. A Fully Magnetically Levitated Left Ventricular Assist Device — Final Report \(MOMENTUM 3\). N Engl J Med 2019 \[Primary Trial\]](#)
The pivotal randomized trial establishing HeartMate 3 as the modern standard, comparing it to the older HeartMate II.
- [Mehra MR et al. Five-Year Outcomes in Patients With Fully Magnetically Levitated vs Axial-Flow LVADs — MOMENTUM 3, JAMA 2022 \[Primary Trial\]](#)
5-year survival data: 58% HeartMate 3 vs 49% HeartMate II, and the hemocompatibility event rates (device thrombosis, stroke) that drove the difference.
- [ACC — Sustained Superiority of the HeartMate 3 LVAD: 5-Year Outcomes of the MOMENTUM 3 \[Society\]](#)
Cardiology-society summary of the 5-year MOMENTUM 3 data, used to cross-check the survival and composite-outcome numbers.
- [INTERMACS Annual Report — driveline infection and gastrointestinal bleeding incidence \[Registry\]](#)
National registry source for driveline infection incidence (~0.16 events per patient-year; 19% by 12 months) and GI bleeding incidence (18%/23%/27% at 1/2/3 years), used for the complication rates in this guide.
- [Gastrointestinal bleeding on continuous-flow LVAD therapy — ESC Heart Failure 2023 \[Peer Reviewed\]](#)
Explains why continuous-flow pumps cause GI bleeding (acquired von Willebrand syndrome, arteriovenous malformations), used for the mechanism explanation.
- [American Heart Association — Left Ventricular Assist Devices \[Patient Education\]](#)
Plain-language framing for what an LVAD is and how it fits into heart failure treatment.
- [Cleveland Clinic — Left Ventricular Assist Device \(LVAD\) \[Patient Education\]](#)
Patient-facing description of the device, the driveline, and daily-life adaptations (batteries, showering, equipment bag).
- [Mayo Clinic — Ventricular assist device \[Patient Education\]](#)
Patient-facing explanation of bridge-to-transplant versus destination therapy, used for the two-pathway framing.



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About This Guide

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Version: 2026-08-15

Reviewer note: Reviewed against the American Heart Association, Cleveland Clinic, and Mayo Clinic LVAD pages. Ours adds: the 5-year MOMENTUM 3 survival comparison as a chart, a plain diagram of the pump and driveline, a two-year complication trend chart for GI bleeding and driveline infection, and a clear split between bridge-to-transplant and destination therapy.

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