Understanding Heart Failure
An Educational Guide for Patients and Families Living with Heart Failure

uabmedicine.org/heart
800-UAB-8816
Welcome to UAB Hospital in Birmingham, Alabama.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you and your family with information on how to manage your heart failure.

This booklet will provide you with information about the definition of heart failure. It will also provide you with information on how to take care of yourself at home, and tell you about specific areas such as your diet, exercise, medications, and managing stress.

We invite you to share this booklet with family and friends. Your doctors, nurses, and other members of the team will be talking to you about the information in this booklet. Please feel free to ask questions and express any concerns.
What Happens to the Heart with Heart Failure?

When heart failure occurs it can affect the left or right side of the heart, or both sides.

When the right side of the heart cannot pump the blood very well to the lungs, it can cause blood to back up in the body's veins, causing swelling in the abdomen, legs, and ankles.

The left side of the heart is a very strong muscle and moves blood filled with oxygen to the rest of the body. There are 2 types of left-sided heart failure.

Heart failure may occur when the ventricle is weak (Systolic heart failure) or if the ventricle is stiff (Diastolic heart failure).

Systolic and diastolic heart failure have the same results, but the causes and the actions are different. Therefore, the treatment for the 2 types of heart failure will also be different.

IMPORTANT FACT: There is no cure for heart failure. There are many things you can do to keep heart failure from getting worse and to prevent symptoms. This is why it is important to follow your recommended treatment plan.
Symptoms of Heart Failure

One way to take care of yourself is to keep a close eye on your symptoms and call your health care provider if they should get worse. Each person responds differently to heart failure. Some people have more problems with retaining fluid, and other people have more problems with not enough blood flowing to the body. Some people may have trouble with both types of heart failure.

Symptoms of fluid retention are shortness of breath, ankle swelling, and fullness or bloating in the belly. Symptoms related to not enough blood flow to the body include fatigue, feeling dizzy, aches and pains, and anxiety.

The following chart is a list of the most common symptoms, what causes the symptom, and what you should do about the symptom when you have it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>What Causes the Symptom</th>
<th>What You Should Do About the Symptom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tiredness or Weakness</td>
<td>The blood flow to your body is reduced because your heart is not pumping as it should</td>
<td>Make sure you take all your medications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Appetite</td>
<td>Fluid builds up in your stomach because your heart is not pumping as it should</td>
<td>Make time to rest or take naps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coughing or Wheezing</td>
<td>Fluid builds up in your lungs because your heart is not pumping as it should</td>
<td>Make sure you take all your medications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dizziness</td>
<td>The blood flow to your body is reduced because your heart is not pumping as it should</td>
<td>If you faint, let your health care provider know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medications might be affecting your blood pressure as well</td>
<td>Make sure you take all your medications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be careful standing up from a sitting or lying position</td>
<td>Separate your blood pressure medications by 1 to 2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swelling of Ankles, Legs or</td>
<td>Fluid builds up in your body because your heart is not pumping as it should</td>
<td>Report weight gain of 5 pounds or more to your health care provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach (Belly)</td>
<td>Fluid builds up in your body because your heart is not pumping as it should</td>
<td>Make sure you take all your medications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Heart Rate</td>
<td>Fast heart rates or bounding pulse can be due to the reduced blood flow or irregular rhythms</td>
<td>Report heart rates that significantly bother you to your health care provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fluid builds up in your lungs because your heart is not pumping as it should</td>
<td>Watch your fluid and salt intake carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fluid builds up in your lungs because your heart is not pumping as it should</td>
<td>Make sure you take all your medications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in Weight</td>
<td>Fluid builds up in your body because your heart is not pumping as well as it should</td>
<td>Report weight gain of 5 pounds or more to your health care provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fluid builds up in your body because your heart is not pumping as well as it should</td>
<td>Make sure you take all your medications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IMPORTANT FACT:** If you experience a symptom—especially if it is a new symptom such as shortness of breath—it is important for you to call your health care provider.

The following chart will help you decide which foods are low and high in sodium.

**Diet and Heart Failure**

Restricting the salt (sodium) in your diet is a way to manage your heart failure. Too much salt in your diet causes you to retain fluid and can lead to swelling and shortness of breath.

Your health care provider will tell you how much sodium you can have in one day. Most of the time, you will need to stay on a 2,000 mg a day sodium restricted diet.

You can reduce sodium in your diet by doing the following:

- **Stop adding salt to your food that you are cooking or eating.**
- **Buy fresh or frozen meats or fish. Do not use processed meats.**
- **Do not use meats with sauces or marinades.**
- **Eat fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. Avoid canned foods.**
- **Try to avoid fast foods. Ask for sodium content when eating out.**
- **Be sure to read food labels to help limit your salt intake.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Sodium (Salt)</th>
<th>Low Sodium (Salt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potato chips, pretzels</td>
<td>Whole grain breads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crackers with salt on top</td>
<td>Rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant hot cereals</td>
<td>Pasta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pizza</td>
<td>Cooked hot cereals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned vegetables</td>
<td>Fresh vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickles</td>
<td>Frozen plain vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables with sauces</td>
<td>Low sodium canned soups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned soups</td>
<td>Processed or dried fruits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processed or dried fruits</td>
<td>Fresh fruits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttermilk</td>
<td>Milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processed cheese</td>
<td>Yogurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoked, cured or salted meats</td>
<td>Fresh meats, chicken, fish or seafood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch meat</td>
<td>Canned meats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottled salad dressing</td>
<td>Vegetable, olive, sunflower oil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LOWERING THE AMOUNT OF SODIUM (SALT) IN YOUR DIET**

To reduce sodium in your diet:

1. **Limit your salt intake.**
2. **Limit sodium in your diet.**
3. **Eat fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables.**
4. **Avoid canned foods.**
5. **Limit processed meats.**
6. **Stop adding salt to your food that you are cooking or eating.**
7. **Buy fresh or frozen meats or fish. Do not use processed meats.**
8. **Do not use meats with sauces or marinades.**
9. **Eat fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. Avoid canned foods.**
10. **Try to avoid fast foods. Ask for sodium content when eating out.**
11. **Be sure to read food labels to help limit your salt intake.**
Diet and Heart Failure

RESTRICTING THE AMOUNT OF FLUID YOU DRINK

People with heart failure need to limit daily fluid intake. Extra fluid makes your heart work harder and causes you to have more symptoms. You need to decrease the amount of fluids in your diet. Fluid limits are different for everyone. Usually fluids are limited to 1 ½ liter to 2 liters a day.

- 2 liters = 2,000 cc or ml; ½ gallon; 8 cups
- 1 ½ liter = 1,500 cc or ml; 6 cups
- 1 liter = 1,000 cc or ml; 1 quart; 4 cups
- 1 cup = 8 ounces

If you’re limited to a 2-liter or 2,000-ml fluid restriction, it’s equal to about 8 cups of water.

If you’re limited to a 1-liter or 1,000-ml fluid restriction, it’s equal to about 4 cups of water.

Important Fact: Foods that count as a fluid include ice, popsicles, Jell-o, sherbet, ice cream, yogurt, applesauce, soup, and pudding

Examples of fruits with high fluid content:
- 1 ¼ cup of watermelon or cantaloupe = 6 fl. oz. (¾ cup)
- 1 orange or ½ grapefruit = 4 fl. oz. (½ cup)

Restricting the amount of fluid you drink

Look at the number of calories per serving. In this label a serving size is 1 cup and has 168 calories.

Read labels to find out how much sodium is in your food.

Select foods with no more than 140mg of sodium per serving.

Avoid foods with more than 300mg of sodium per serving.

Reading labels will become an important part of managing your heart failure.

LIMITING THE CHOLESTEROL AND FAT IN YOUR DIET

Cholesterol is a fat that is found in the bloodstream and the body’s cells. Too much cholesterol can cause a build up in the walls of blood vessels and clog your arteries. It can lead to coronary artery disease and make your heart failure worse.

Limiting the amount of cholesterol you eat will help to manage your heart failure.

Limiting the amount of fat intake can also help manage your heart failure. Saturated and trans fats are most harmful and should be limited. These fats can raise blood levels of cholesterol, which can increase the risk of heart attack and coronary artery disease.

Monounsaturated fats are better to eat and can help to bring cholesterol levels down. Examples of monounsaturated fats are nuts and seeds, olives, and canola, peanut, and olive oils.

TIPS FOR COOKING AND EATING OUT

Even when you must eat away from home, you can do it in a healthy way.

Ask for heart-healthy menus.

Ask for food with no salt or MSG.

Use fat-free or 1% milk.

Choose broiled, grilled, steamed, or poached foods instead of fried foods.

Use low-fat or fat-free salad dressings or none at all.

Ask for salad dressing or sauces to be on the side.

Choose substitutions like a baked potato or steamed vegetables instead of French fries or breaded and fried vegetables.

Use small amounts of light or fat-free margarine instead of butter or stick margarine.

Important Fact: Seasonings that have low or no salt include basil, dill, curry, chives, paprika, thyme, oregano, rosemary, red pepper, ginger, onion powder, garlic powder, and black pepper.

Important note:

Below are ways to decrease cholesterol and fat from your diet.

- Use skim or low-fat milk
- Eat low-fat cheese
- Remove skin from chicken or turkey
- Eat baked, grilled, broiled (not in butter), steamed foods
- Use egg whites
- Try low-fat frozen yogurt

UAB EatRight Recipe Crispy Chicken Fingers

1 pound skinned, boned chicken breasts, cut into 18 strips
1/4 cup low-fat mayonnaise
2/3 cup instant potato flakes
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/8 teaspoon paprika
Vegetable cooking spray

Combine chicken strips and mayonnaise in a shallow bowl and turn chicken strips to coat well. Combine potato flakes and next four ingredients in another shallow bowl. Dredge chicken strips in potato flakes mixture and place on baking sheet coated with cooking spray. Bake at 375 ° for 18 minutes and broil 3 inches from heat (with electric oven door partially opened) for 3 minutes or until chicken is lightly browned and crispy.

Yield: 6 servings

Per serving: Calories 142, fat 4g, sat fat 2g, protein 18g, carbohydrate 7g, fiber <1g, cholesterol 45mg, sodium 308mg
## Diet and Heart Failure

The following chart will help you choose foods that are better for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food group</th>
<th>Recommended Foods</th>
<th>Foods NOT Recommended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grains</td>
<td>Most breads, as long as they are not topped with salt (yeast breads usually have less sodium than those made with baking soda)</td>
<td>Bread/crackers topped with salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Many cold cereals, especially shredded wheat, bran flakes and puffed rice or wheat</td>
<td>Cereals with more than 300 mg sodium per serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooked cereals, pastas, rice and other starches made without salt</td>
<td>Biscuits, cornbread and other &quot;quick&quot; breads prepared with baking soda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bread crumbs or stuffing mix from a store (homemade OK if from a low-sodium recipe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>Fresh and frozen vegetables without added sauces, salt, or sodium</td>
<td>Canned vegetables (unless they are salt-free)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homemade soups (salt-free or low-sodium)</td>
<td>Vegetables with sauces or cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low-sodium or sodium-free canned vegetables and soups</td>
<td>Vegetables prepared with bouillion cubes or fatty meats such as ham hocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sauerkraut, pickled vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>Fresh fruits</td>
<td>Canned or dried soups (unless they are low sodium or salt free)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>French fries and onion rings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Nonfat (skin) or 1% fat milk</td>
<td>Buttermilk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonfat or low-fat yogurt</td>
<td>Processed cheese and cheese foods (natural cheese should be eaten only in small amounts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small amounts of low-fat natural cheese or reduced-sodium cheese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat and Other Protein Foods</td>
<td>Fresh meats and fish (check labels for frozen products)</td>
<td>Cured or smoked meats (bacon, ham, sausage, Vienna sausage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tuna packed in water</td>
<td>Canned meats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dried beans and peas</td>
<td>Lunch meats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eggs, especially egg whites</td>
<td>Canned or smoked fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desserts, Snacks</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angel food cake</td>
<td>High-sodium frozen meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsalted pretzels, popcorn, or nuts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low-fat pudding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fats, Oils</td>
<td>Tub or liquid margarine</td>
<td>Salted butter or margarine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsaturated fat oils (canola, olive, corn, sunflower, safflower, peanut)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condiments</td>
<td>Fresh or dried herbs</td>
<td>Salt, sea salt, garlic salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spices</td>
<td>Seasoning mixes containing salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vinegar</td>
<td>Bouillion cubes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lemon or lime juice</td>
<td>Ketchup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pepper sauce</td>
<td>Worcestershire sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salt-free seasoning mixes</td>
<td>Soy sauce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simple salad dressings (such as vinegar and oil)</td>
<td>Salsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pickles, olives, relish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Exercise and Heart Failure

Exercise can improve the function of your heart, help to reduce stress, and make you feel better. Walking, very light weight-lifting (less than 10 pounds) and water workouts are types of activities that will improve muscle strength and energy levels. Walk and exercise at your own pace. You may need to pause and catch your breath.

Before you start an exercise program or increase your activity level, talk with your health care provider. Your doctor may perform some exercise testing before choosing the best exercise program for you.

The goal for exercise is to work towards 20-30 minutes of activity per day, 6 days a week. You do not have to be active for 30 minutes in a row to gain from exercise. For instance, you can try being active for 10 minute blocks three times during the day.

One thing to know is that the harder the activity, the shorter the time you need to be active to profit from it. If you do a less intense activity, such as working in the garden or light housework, you can do it for a longer period of time.

You must watch for signs of being over-tired or over-stressed while exercising.

**IMPORTANT FACT:** If you have any of these symptoms while you are active, slow down. If the symptoms do not get better, stop the activity. Call 911 if your chest pain or symptoms do not go away.
Cardiac Rehabilitation

A Cardiac Rehabilitation program, which is a structured exercise program for patients with heart problems, may be the best option for you. Your blood pressure, heart rate, and response to exercise are watched closely. At the end of the program, an exercise plan is outlined for you.

UAB Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation helps patients gain the highest level of function and independence possible and improve their quality of life—physically, emotionally, and socially.

The program has three main parts:

• Exercise—You’ll learn how to exercise safely, strengthen your muscles, and improve your stamina, all under the care of medical specialists. Your fitness plan will be made to suit your ability, needs, and interests.
• Education—You’ll find out about your heart condition, how to manage it, and ways to reduce your risk of future heart problems.
• Encouragement—Discover how to end unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking, and start healthy ones, like eating a heart-healthy diet and incorporating exercise into your daily life. You will also learn how to manage stress and adjust to the changes you’ll need to make to live your healthiest life.

How to Exercise

• Walking is the best activity. Start slowly and as you get stronger, walk for longer amounts of time.
• Try to make exercise a habit. Do it every morning or evening.
• Ask family and friends to exercise with you.
• Wear comfortable shoes and clothing.
• Don’t exercise outside in extreme heat or cold. Find a local church, gym, shopping mall, or recreational center where you can walk inside.

Signs of too much activity include:

• Being so short of breath that you cannot have a chat or say more than a few words while you are active
• Being so short of breath that it does not get better when you slow down or stop the activity
• Getting dizzy or feeling faint
• Having chest pain, tightness or pressure
• Having pain in your shoulders, arms, neck or jaw
• Having skipped heartbeats or really fast or slow heart rate (pulse)

Important Fact: Talk to your health care provider before starting any exercise program.

Research has found that cardiac rehabilitation benefits patients in the following ways:

• Improvement in exercise tolerance
• Improvement in heart-related symptoms
• Improvement in blood lipid levels
• Reduction in cigarette smoking
• Improvement in psychosocial well-being and reduction in stress
Medications and Heart Failure

Medications play an important role in managing your heart failure. It is very important that you know the medications you are prescribed, understand how your medications work, and that you take them as prescribed by your health care provider.

**MEDICINES TO AVOID**

There are many medicines, both ordered by your doctor and ones you can buy over-the-counter, that people with heart failure should avoid.

**Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS)** are one group of medicines that you should not take if you have heart failure. These include drugs such as ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Toradol, and Celebrex. They can cause swelling, affect other heart failure drugs and/or worsen symptoms. These drugs can also harm kidney function.

**Calcium Channel Blockers:** Most of the time, doctors will not prescribe some medicines that can lower the pumping of the heart such as calcium-channel blockers. These include diltiazem (Cardizem, Cartia, Dilta) and verapamil (Calan, Verelan). These drugs can also cause the body to hold excess fluid.

**Herbs and Supplements:** There are hundreds of herbs and supplements on the market today. Many of them can cause problems with the current drugs that you are taking. Talk to your doctor about these before you begin taking them.

**Over the Counter Decongestants:** Avoid medicines containing pseudoephedrine or any cold medications with the “D” component because it may worsen your heart failure, raise your blood pressure, or cause an irregular heart rhythm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medication</th>
<th>Names of Medications</th>
<th>What the Medication Does</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors (ACE Inhibitors)</td>
<td>Capoten (captopril) Vasotec (enalapril) Prinivil, Zestril (lisinopril) Lotensin (benazepril) Monopril (fosinopril) Altace (ramipril) Accupril (quinapril) Acoza (perindopril) Mayek (trandolapril) Unisic (moexipril)</td>
<td>Helps to lower your blood pressure, make it easier for your heart to pump blood Helps your heart failure even when you don’t have high blood pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARB’s)</td>
<td>Atacand (candesartan) Tefetan (eprosartan) Avapro (irbesartan) Micardis (telmisartan) Diovan (valsartan)</td>
<td>Helps to lower your blood pressure, make it easier for your heart to pump blood Helps your heart failure even when you don’t have high blood pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta blockers</td>
<td>Carvedilol (Coreg®, Coreg CR®) Metoprolol (Lopressor®, Toprol-XL®) Atenolol (Tenormin®) Labeltal (Trandate®) Betaxolol (Kerlone®, Betoptic®) Bisoprolol (Zebeta®) Esmolol (Brevibloc®) Nebivolol (Betaxol®) Propranolol (Inderal®, Betapace®, Sorine®) Sotalol (Betapace®, Sorine®) Acebutolol (Sectral®, Betaxol®)</td>
<td>Helps the heart to beat more slowly and lowers blood pressure Can make your heart stronger even when you don’t have high blood pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diuretics (Fluid or Water Pills)</td>
<td>Lasix (furosemide) Demadex (torsemide) Zaroxolyn (metolazone) Bumex (bumetanide)</td>
<td>Helps to get rid of extra fluid and salt from the body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldosterone inhibitors</td>
<td>Aldactone (spironolactone)</td>
<td>Helps to get rid of extra fluid and salt from the body Can make your heart stronger even when you don’t have high blood pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasodilator Agents</td>
<td>Hydralazine Hydralazine and isosorbide dinitrate (BiDil) Isosorbide dinitrate (isordil) Isosorbide mononitrate (ISM0)</td>
<td>Helps to lower your blood pressure by relaxing the blood vessel walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiac Glycoside</td>
<td>Lanoxin (Digoxin)</td>
<td>Helps the heart to pump more strongly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The most common types of heart failure medications are:**

**Here are some tips that can help you to do well with taking your medications:**

- Purchase pill boxes labeled with the days of the week. Fill the boxes at the start of the week with all of your daily drugs so that you do not miss any.
- Always carry a list of your current drugs and their doses with you (in your wallet or purse). You may want to write the doses in pencil so that you can quickly change them after doctors’ visits.
- Always take your drugs with you when you travel. You should also bring a few extra days worth in case you are gone longer than planned. When you travel, pack your drugs in your carry-on baggage, never in your checked luggage.
- Never skip pills or cut your pills to save money.
- Consider the time of day if you will be traveling when taking your diuretics (water pills)

**IMPORTANT FACT:** Call your health care provider if you have any questions about your medications.
Heart Failure Therapies

There are other treatment options such as cardiac devices and mechanical circulatory assist devices (LVADs) that may be offered to you to help manage your heart failure.

Pacemakers are used to send electrical signals to help the heart pump better. These are often called Biventricular pacemakers or CRT devices.

Defibrillators are used to correct abnormal heart rhythms that could be dangerous. If the heart were to stop, this device would help it to start again.

Mechanical Circulatory Assist Devices (LVADs) are devices that are placed surgically into your weakened heart to pump the blood to the rest of your body. These devices can be used as a bridge to heart transplantation or as destination therapy in patients who are ineligible for transplant. This procedure is for a select group of patients who meet the selection criteria after a formal evaluation.

Heart Transplantation is a surgical replacement of your heart with a donor organ. This procedure is for a select group of patients with end-stage heart failure who meet the selection criteria after a formal evaluation.

Sex and Heart Failure

Heart failure may affect how much energy you have to do the things you enjoy.

It is normal to worry about how much your heart can handle. The amount of energy it takes to climb two flights of stairs is the same amount of energy needed to have sexual relations with your partner. As with any activity, you should not have sex if you are feeling ill, are very short of breath, or if you are having chest pain.

Sexual activity will not make your heart failure worse. While sex may not be as easy as it once was, it is safe and can still be a pleasing experience for you and your partner.

People with heart failure may have problems with sex, such as decreased sex drive, impotence, or failure to climax. Discuss any questions or concerns you may have about sex with your doctor or nurse.

Smoking and Heart Failure

Smoking hurts the heart and the lungs by making them work harder. It can make heart failure worse.

If you are a smoker, now is the time to stop. The benefits of quitting start immediately.

Ask your clinician about ways to quit. You may be eligible for nicotine replacement therapy to help you.

Second-hand smoke is also harmful, so stay away from places where you may breathe in second-hand smoke.

Alcohol and Heart Failure

Alcohol makes your heart weaker, even if it is not the reason you developed heart failure.

Ask your health care provider if it is safe for you to drink alcohol. You may be advised to stop drinking alcohol altogether.
Dealing with Stress

Heart failure symptoms can worsen with increased stress. Anxiety, anger, or excitement can cause your heart to work harder.

**IMPORTANT FACT:** Managing your stress is one way to help manage your heart failure.

Chronic stress disrupts nearly all systems in your body. It can raise blood pressure, decrease the immune system, and increase the risk of heart attack, stroke and heart failure. Long-term stress can even rewire the brain, leaving you more prone to worry and sadness.

Try to surround yourself with positive, supportive, and encouraging people in your life. Seek a support group to help you talk about how you are feeling. Learn to recognize stressful situations.

Here is a list of ways to help cope with stress.

- Call a good friend on the phone.
- Start a quiet hobby.
- Do things you enjoy like reading a book and/or spending time with friends and family.
- Go for a walk to clear your mind.
- Talk to your pastor, rabbi, or priest.
- Relax by doing breathing exercises or meditation.
- Avoid stressful situations like rush hour traffic or being late.

Dealing with Depression

Depression can be very common when you have heart disease or heart failure. Depression can be treated with medications, therapy, and other treatments. Talk to your medical provider if you think you may be depressed.

Things that can lead to depression are multiple losses in your life, being diagnosed with a medical condition, lack of sleep, lack of exercise, substance abuse, or eating an unhealthy diet.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, you have major depression if you experience five or more of the following signs and symptoms for at least a two-week period:

- **Persistent sadness, pessimism**
- **Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, or hopelessness**
- **Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities, including sex**
- **Difficulty concentrating and complaints of poor memory**
- **Worsening of co-existing chronic disease, such as rheumatoid arthritis or diabetes**
- **Insomnia or oversleeping**
- **Weight gain or loss**
- **Fatigue, lack of energy**
- **Anxiety, agitation, irritability**
- **Thoughts of suicide or death**
- **Slow speech, slow movements**
- **Headache, stomachache, and digestive problems**

If you have thoughts of suicide or hurting yourself or others, seek immediate professional help.
Following your treatment plan can help you manage your heart failure. You can make changes in your daily life to help you stay healthy and lessen the worsening of heart failure symptoms.

Watch your Weight | Weight gain can be a sign that your body is keeping too much fluid.

Checking your weight is a key way to manage your heart failure. If you gain too much fluid it means that your heart failure might be worsening.

Purchase a bathroom scale if you don’t have one. Make sure you can see the numbers on the scale. Dial scales may be harder to read, but are more exact than digital scales. Place your scale in a handy location. Place the scale on a flat surface without carpet.

Use a calendar, notebook paper, or log to track your weight and keep it by your scale. Each morning, step on the scale after you empty your bladder, before eating or drinking. Always weigh with minimal clothing or no clothing. Record your weight every day.

Contact your health care provider to report weight gain. If you delay in calling your doctor you may need a hospital stay.

Maintain a Healthy Weight with Diet and Exercise | Eating a healthy diet that is low in sodium, cholesterol, and fats can help you control your heart failure. Maintaining a healthy weight by eating less calories if you are overweight and more calories if you are underweight is important.

Exercise may help you maintain that healthy weight. Exercise is also part of helping your heart become stronger. Increase your exercise to a low or moderate intensity.

Watch your fluid intake and stick to your fluid restriction if it is prescribed for you.

Monitor your Symptoms | It is so important to monitor your symptoms. Learn the signs and symptoms of heart failure and report them to your health care provider. These signs and symptoms are: pain in jaw, neck, or chest; increased shortness of breath; fatigue or being very tired; dizziness or fainting; swelling in feet, ankles, legs, or belly; and racing heart beats.

Report worsening symptoms of heart failure to your health care provider.

Keep a log or journal of how you feel each day. Report worsening symptoms of heart failure to your health care provider.

Limit Alcohol | Ask your health care provider if it is safe for you to drink alcohol. You may be advised to stop drinking alcohol altogether.

Stop Smoking | Quitting smoking may be the most important thing you do to help your heart.

Reduce Stress | Stress makes your blood pressure go up and makes your heart work harder. Try to relax and avoid stressful situations.

Flu Shots | Being sick with the flu could make your heart failure worse. By getting a flu shot every year, you can help yourself stay well. Wash your hands often.

When to Call Your Health Care Provider | You should attend all of your scheduled appointments. Call your doctor if you start to feel worse or have new feelings that are uncomfortable.

SOME EXAMPLES OF WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR ARE:

• You find it harder to breathe at rest or with activity
• You are getting tired faster or getting weaker
• You start coughing at night or have a dry, hacking cough
• You are unable to sleep while lying down
• You gain 5 lbs or more in 3 days or 2 lbs or more overnight
• Your feet, ankles, or abdomen swell more than usual
• You do not pass the usual amount of urine after taking your fluid pill
• You feel dizzy or faint, have tightness or pain in your chest, or if your heart skips, jumps, flutters, or “runs away”

Call 911 if you have serious trouble breathing, have new chest pain, or if the pain does not get better after you take your medications.