

Living With Heart Failure



Heart failure means the heart muscle is weakened.

A weaker heart muscle cannot pump blood as well as it should. Some blood that should be pumped out of the heart may back up instead of flowing forward. Fluid can then build up in the lungs and other parts of the body.

Heart failure is sometimes called *congestive heart failure*, or CHF. It is a chronic (long-term) problem. It can affect other organs in the body, such as the kidneys, lungs, or liver. Although it cannot be cured, heart failure can be managed.

If you have heart failure, be sure you have:

- Correct list of your medicines
- Pill box or other way to remind you about medicines
- Digital scale to weigh yourself
- Daily weights written down
- Meal plan
- Activity plan
- Heart failure action plan – what to do if your symptoms change

If you have questions about any of these, ask your nurse or doctor.

Your Daily Reminders



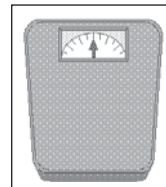
Take your pills as prescribed – even if you feel good. Be sure to keep a correct list of your medicines.



- Don't add salt at the table or in cooking.
- Use products marked "low sodium" or "no salt."
- Avoid high-salt foods such as soups, sauces, bouillon, lunch meats, cheese, fast foods, packaged food, canned foods, and salty snacks.
- Limit fast food and eating out.
- If you have trouble, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian.



Do not smoke. Ask your doctor about quitting. Even second-hand smoke from those around you can be harmful.



Weigh yourself every day – before breakfast and with the same amount of clothes on. Keep a daily record and show your doctor at each visit.



You may be asked to limit the amount of fluid you drink each day. **Ask your doctor** how much you can safely have. Avoid alcohol.



Remain as active as you can. But you may need frequent rest periods during the day.

Keep your legs up (on pillows or a footrest) when resting. Ask your doctor how much activity you should do.

More about managing your heart failure

Symptoms for both men and women can be mild to severe. Your symptoms might include:

- Trouble breathing – Some people have to sleep sitting up or cannot sleep because of trouble breathing.
- Pain or tightness in the chest – Call your doctor right away if this happens
- Swelling (edema) in your feet, ankles, legs, or abdomen (stomach).
- Sudden weight gain – This means your body may be holding on to fluid.
- Tiredness or weakness – You are not able to carry out your normal routine.
- Other symptoms – Frequent dry cough, loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting, and abdominal tenderness.

You may need to take medicines to improve the way your heart pumps and help relieve symptoms.

- Know your medicines and how to take them. Ask about anything you don't understand.
- Have all your prescriptions filled at the same pharmacy. That way the pharmacist knows whether all your medicines will work well together.
- If you have trouble paying for your medicines, ask us about programs that can help you.
- Use a pill box or chart to remind you which medicines to take when.
- Always bring a list of your medicines to any doctor or hospital visit.
- **Do not take** any new medicines without asking your doctor or pharmacist. This includes over-the-counter drugs or herbal supplements.
- **Never** stop or change the way you take your medicines on your own.

Weigh yourself each morning

Your weight will tell you if your body is holding or losing too much fluid. When you have heart failure, rapid changes in your weight are **from fluid**, not food. Your doctor needs to know about these changes right away.

- If you **gain** more than 3 pounds in a day or two, this is not normal. Report this to your doctor.
- If you **gain** more than 5 pounds in one week, report it to your doctor.
- If you **lose** more than 5 pounds in two to five days, report it to your doctor.

Reduce your salt intake

Less salt (sodium) in your diet will help prevent fluid build-up in your body. You may also be asked to limit how much water and fluids you drink. Ask for a list of foods you may have and foods you should stay away from. Talk with your doctor if you would like a dietitian to help you with a meal plan.

Ask how much activity you can do

Talk with your doctor about a plan to help build your strength. Rest periods should be part of this plan. Plan ahead to avoid doing too many chores or errands in one day. Try to avoid going outdoors on Ozone Alert days and very cold days. If you must go out on a very cold day, wear a mask or cover your nose and mouth with a scarf.

Follow your heart failure action plan

We will give you a plan that is set up like the colors of a traffic light. When you're in the "green zone," that means things are stable. The "yellow zone" means take caution. The "red zone" means stop and call for help right away. Review your action plan each day so you know what to do if your symptoms change.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.