

UNDERSTANDING HEART FAILURE



An Educational Guide for Patients

WELCOME



WELCOME TO UAB MEDICINE.

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

This booklet provides information on the definition of heart failure, how to take care of yourself at home, and things such as diet, exercise, medications, and managing stress.

We invite you to share this booklet with family and friends. Your doctors and nurses will discuss this information with you before you go home. Please feel free to ask questions and bring up any concerns.

WHAT IS HEART FAILURE?

Heart failure is a very common illness in the United States. It affects over 550,000 Americans each year.

Heart failure means that the heart is not able to pump blood to the rest of your body the way it should. It can be caused by a heart attack, coronary heart disease, heart valves that are not working properly, or other problems affecting the heart. Some of these other problems could include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, being overweight, and too much stress.

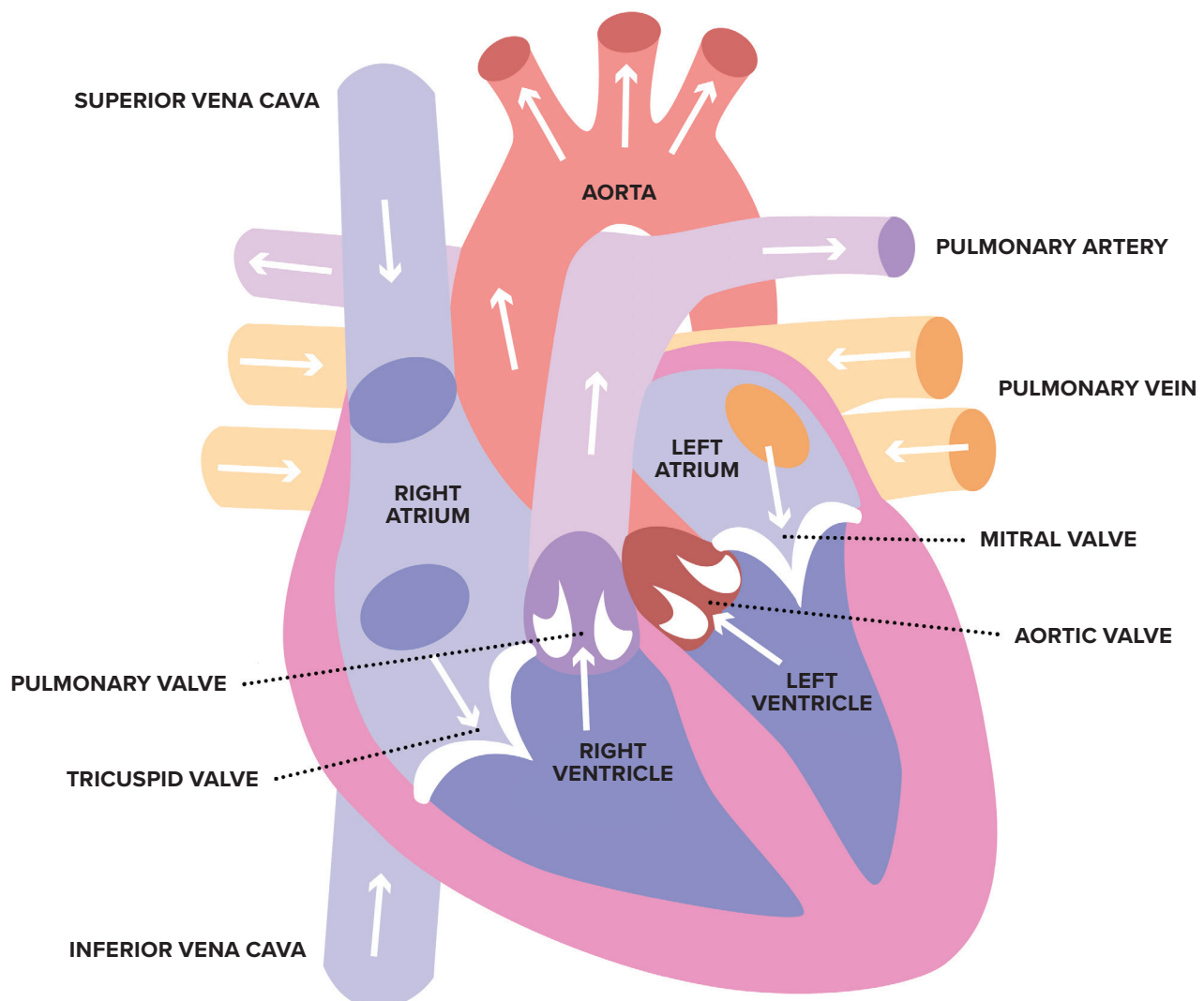
There are many things you can do to stay well and healthy if you have heart failure. This booklet will give you tools to help with that.

HOW DOES A NORMAL HEART WORK?

The heart is a four-chamber organ in the middle of the chest beneath the breast bone. The purpose of the heart is to pump blood, rich in oxygen, to the rest of the body. This blood keeps all of the vital organs healthy. The heart has its own blood supply, which is provided through the coronary arteries that surround the outside of the heart like a hand.

CHAMBERS OF THE HEART

The right side of the heart receives blood from the body that is low in oxygen. It then moves the blood to the lungs to be refilled with oxygen before returning it to the left side of the heart. The left side is the pumping side, which moves blood out to the rest of the body, vital organs, and the brain.





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 blood very well to the lungs, it can cause blood to back up in the body's veins, resulting in 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:

1. Systolic heart failure, also called heart failure with reduced ejection fraction, is a pumping problem where the left side of the heart does not pump blood well to the organs of the body.
2. Diastolic heart failure, also called heart failure with preserved ejection fraction, occurs when the heart is not able to rest between beats.

Both types of heart failure can have similar results, but the causes and the actions are different. So, the treatment for the two types of heart failure may 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 the symptoms get worse. Each person responds differently to heart failure. Some people have more problems holding on to fluid, and other people don't have 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 having enough blood flow to the body include tiredness, feeling dizzy, aches and pains, and anxiety.

The chart below lists the most common symptoms, what causes the symptom, and what you should do about the symptom if you have it.

Symptom	What Causes the Symptom	What You Should Do about the Symptom
Shortness of breath	Fluid builds up in your lungs because your heart is not pumping as well as it should.	Report new and worse shortness of breath to your health care provider. Make sure to take all of your medications.
Fast heart rate	Fast heart rates or a pounding pulse can be due to the reduced blood flow and the heart not pumping properly.	Report heart rates that significantly bother you to your health care provider. Make sure to take all of your medications.
Increase in weight	Fluid builds up in your body because your heart is not pumping as well as it should.	Report weight gain of 5 pounds or more to your health care provider. Make sure to take all of your medications.
Swelling of ankles, legs or stomach (belly)	Fluid builds up in your body because your heart is not pumping as well as it should.	Report weight gain of 5 pounds or more to your health care provider. Make sure to take all of your medications.
Dizziness	The blood flow to your body is reduced because your heart is not pumping as well as it should.	If you faint, report it to your health care provider. Make sure to take all of your medications.
Coughing or wheezing	Fluid builds up in your lungs because your heart is not pumping as well as it should.	Report weight gain of 5 pounds or more to your health care provider. Make sure to take all of your medications.
Loss of appetite	Fluid builds up in your in your stomach area because your heart is not pumping as well as it should.	Report weight gain of 5 pounds or more to your health care provider Make sure to take all of your medications.
Tiredness or weakness	The blood flow to your body is reduced because your heart is not pumping as well as it should.	Make time to rest or take naps. Make sure to take all of your medications.

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.

HEART FAILURE ZONES: WHICH ZONE ARE YOU IN TODAY?

EVERY DAY

- Weigh yourself every morning. Weigh with the same amount of clothing, with an empty bladder, and before you eat. Use the same scale each time.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- Check for swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, and stomach.
- Eat foods low in salt.
- Stay active.
- Schedule rest times.

GREEN ZONE

THIS IS YOUR GOAL AND WHERE YOU WANT TO BE.

You have:

- No difficulty breathing.
- No weight gain of more than 3 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in a week.
- No swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, or stomach.
- No chest pain.

YELLOW ZONE

IF YOU HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS, PLEASE CALL YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER.

-
- Gained more than 3 pounds today
 - Gained more than 5 pounds this week
 - Trouble breathing or can't catch your breath
 - Swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, or stomach
 - A dry, hacking cough
 - More tired than usual
 - An uneasy feeling, like something just isn't right
 - Feeling like you need to sleep in a chair or like you can't lie down to sleep

RED ZONE

EMERGENCY: CALL 911 OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM

If you:

- Are struggling to breathe.
- Have chest pain.
- Are confused or can't think clearly.
- Feel your heart beating very fast.
- Are lightheaded or dizzy.
- Passed out at home.



DIET AND HEART FAILURE

LOWERING THE AMOUNT OF SODIUM (SALT) IN YOUR DIET

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

Your health care provider will tell you how much sodium you can have per day. Most of the time, you will need to stay on a restricted diet that limits you to 2,000 mg or 3,000 mg of sodium per day.

Just because you need to watch the sodium in your diet doesn't mean you can't enjoy food. Food is a part of everyday life, the center of social events, and something that brings great pleasure.

YOU CAN REDUCE SODIUM IN YOUR DIET BY DOING THE FOLLOWING:

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

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

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

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)			
Servings Per Container 2			
Amount Per Serving			
Calories 168	Calories from Fat 110		
% Daily Value*			
Total Fat 12g			18%
Saturated Fat 3g			15%
Trans Fat 1.5g			
Cholesterol 30mg			10%
Sodium 122mg			20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g			10%
Dietary Fiber 0g			0%
Sugars 5g			
Protein 5g			
Vitamin A			4%
Vitamin C			2%
Calcium			20%
Iron			4%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:			
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

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

DIET AND HEART FAILURE

THE FOLLOWING CHART WILL HELP YOU DECIDE WHICH FOODS ARE LOW AND HIGH IN SODIUM.

HIGH SODIUM (SALT)	LOW SODIUM (SALT)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potato chips, pretzels • Crackers with salt on top • Instant hot cereals • Pizza 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole-grain breads • Rice • Pasta • Cooked hot cereals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canned vegetables • Pickles • Vegetables with sauces • Canned soups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh vegetables • Frozen plain vegetables • Low-sodium canned soups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processed or dried fruits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buttermilk • Processed cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk • Yogurt
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoked, cured, or salted meats • Lunch meat • Canned meats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh meats, chicken, fish, or seafood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottled salad dressing • Ketchup, soy sauce, mayonnaise • Barbeque sauce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetable, olive, or sunflower oil

RESTRICTING HOW MUCH FLUID YOU DRINK

Extra fluid may make your weight go up and makes your heart work harder. To decrease the work on your heart, you may need to reduce the amount of fluid you drink. Your doctor may ask you to decrease your daily fluid intake. Fluid limits are different for everyone. Fluids usually are limited to 1.5 to 2 liters per day.



2 liter =	2,000 cc or ml ½ gallon 8 cups	Half-gallon milk jug Large soda bottle
1½ liter =	1,500 cc or ml	
1 liter =	1,000 cc or ml 1 quart 4 cups	
1 cup =	8 ounces	

- If you are restricted to 2 liters (2,000 ml) of fluid, that is equal to about 8 cups of water.
- If you are restricted to 1 liter (1,000 ml) of fluid, that is equal to about 4 cups of water.

Examples of fruits with high fluid content:

- 1 ¼ cup of watermelon or cantaloupe = 6 fluid ounces
- 1 orange or ½ grapefruit = 4 fluid ounces

IMPORTANT FACT: Foods that count as fluids include ice, popsicles, Jell-O, sherbet, ice cream, yogurt, applesauce, soup, and pudding.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN WATCHING YOUR FLUID

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

Food Group	Recommended Foods	Foods Not Recommended
Grains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most breads, as long as they are not topped with salt (yeast breads usually have less sodium than those made with baking soda) • Many cold cereals, especially shredded wheat, bran flakes, and puffed rice or wheat • Cooked cereals, pastas, rice, and other starches made without salt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bread/crackers topped with salt • Cereals with more than 300 mg sodium per serving • Biscuits, cornbread, and other “quick” breads prepared with baking soda • Bread crumbs or stuffing mix from a store (homemade is OK if from a low-sodium recipe)
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh and frozen vegetables without added sauces, salt, or sodium • Homemade soups (salt-free or low-sodium) • Low-sodium or sodium-free canned vegetables and soups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canned vegetables (unless they are salt-free) • Vegetables with sauces or cheese • Vegetables prepared with bouillon cubes or fatty meats such as ham hocks • Sauerkraut, pickled vegetables • Canned or dried soups (unless they are low-sodium or salt-free) • French fries and onion rings
Fruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh and canned fruits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dried fruits preserved with sodium-containing additives
Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonfat (skim) or 1% fat milk • Nonfat or low-fat yogurt • Small amounts of low-fat natural cheese or reduced-sodium cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buttermilk • Processed cheese and cheese products (natural cheese should be eaten only in small amounts)
Meat and Other Protein Foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh meats and fish (check labels for frozen products) • Tuna packed in water • Dried beans and peas • Eggs, especially egg whites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cured or smoked meats (bacon, ham, sausage, Vienna sausage) • Canned meats • Lunch meats • Canned or smoked fish • High-sodium frozen meals
Desserts and Snacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit • Angel food cake • Unsalted pretzels, popcorn, or nuts • Low-fat pudding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baked goods made with baking soda • Salted snacks such as nuts, chips, or pretzels
Fats and Oils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tub or liquid margarine • Unsaturated fat oils (canola, olive, corn, sunflower, safflower, peanut) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salted butter or margarine
Condiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh or dried herbs • Spices • Vinegar • Lemon or lime juice • Pepper sauce • Salt-free seasoning mixes • Simple salad dressings (such as vinegar and oil) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salt, sea salt, garlic salt • Seasoning mixes containing salt • Bouillon cubes • Ketchup • Barbecue sauce • Worcestershire sauce • Soy sauce • Salsa • Pickles, olives, relish

LIMITING THE CHOLESTEROL AND FAT IN YOUR DIET

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

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

Limiting your fat intake also can help manage your heart failure. Saturated fats are most harmful and should be avoided. Fats work with cholesterol to cause coronary heart disease and increase your risk of heart attack.

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

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), and steamed foods
- Use egg whites (don't eat the yolks)
- Try low-fat frozen yogurt

TIPS FOR COOKING AND EATING OUT

When you must eat away from home, here are a few tips to help you eat healthier:

- Ask for heart-healthy menus.
- Ask for food with no salt or MSG.
- Use fat-free or 1% milk.
- Eat broiled, grilled, steamed, or poached foods instead of fried foods.
- Use 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 margarine instead of butter.

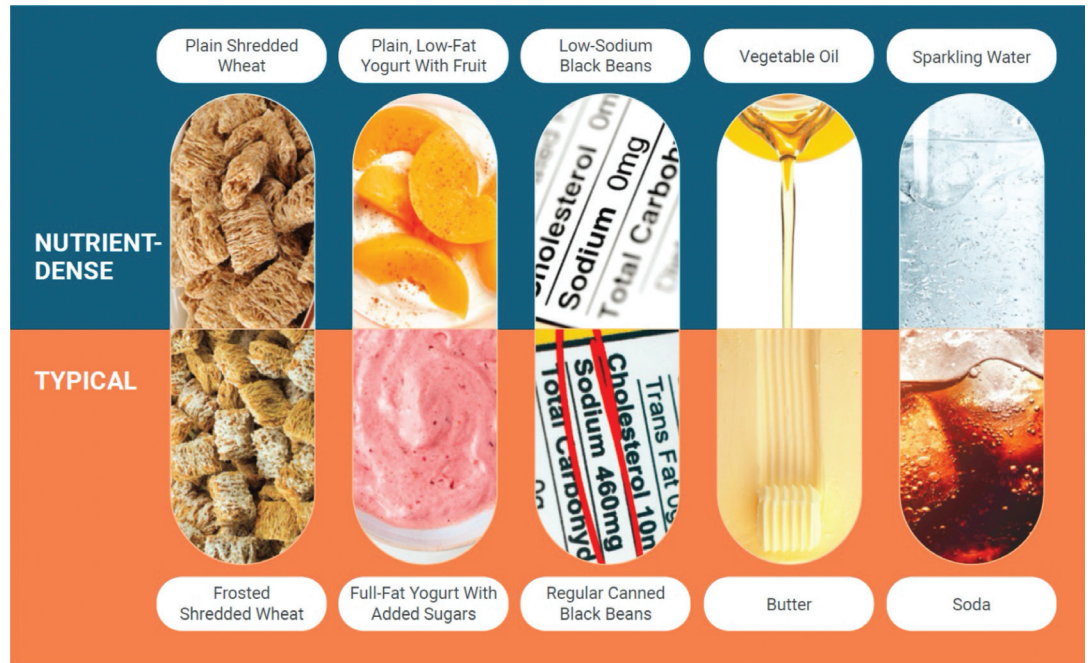


IMPORTANT FACT: Seasonings that are low in salt or salt-free include basil, dill, curry, chives, paprika, thyme, oregano, rosemary, red pepper, ginger, onion powder, garlic powder, and black pepper.

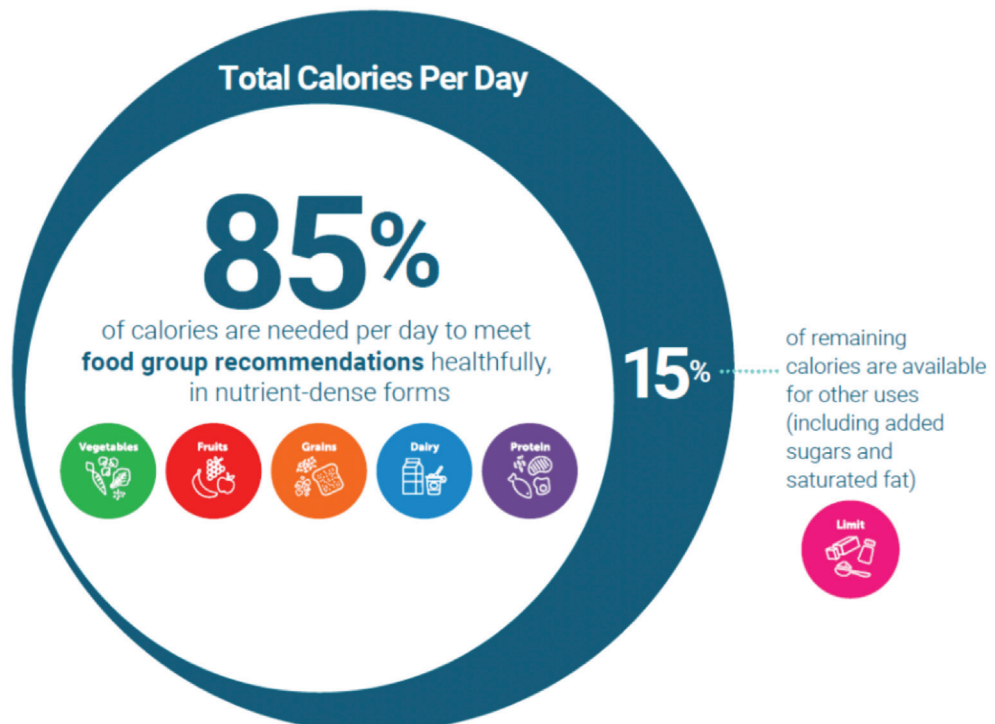
It's important to eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and dairy. Visit myplate.gov to learn more.



Choose nutrient-dense foods instead of typical foods.



Observe the 85-15 guide for food choices.



EXERCISE AND HEART FAILURE

Exercise can improve the function of your heart, help reduce stress, and make you feel better. Walking, light weightlifting, 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 toward 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 example, you can try being active for 10-minute periods three times during the day.

The harder the activity, the shorter the time you need to be active to benefit from it. If you do less intense activities, such as working in the garden or light housework, you can do them for a longer period of time.

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

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 a really fast or slow heart rate (pulse).

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.

HOW TO EXERCISE

- Walking is the best activity. Start slowly, and as you get stronger, walk for longer periods 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 indoors.

CARDIAC REHABILITATION

A cardiac rehabilitation program is a structured exercise routine for patients with heart problems, and it may be a good 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.



IMPORTANT FACT: Talk to your health care provider before starting any exercise program.

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 taking, understand how your medications work, and take them as prescribed by your health care provider.

Here are some tips that can help you do better about 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 dosage with you (in your wallet or purse). You may want to write the dosages 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.
- If you will be traveling when taking your diuretics (water pills), think about the time of day you should take them.

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 people with heart failure should not take. 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 also can harm kidney function.
- **Calcium channel blockers:** Most of the time, doctors will not order some medicines that can lower the pumping of the heart, such as calcium-channel blockers. These include diltiazem (Cardizem, Cartia, Diltia) and verapamil (Calan, Verelan). These drugs also can 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 you are taking. Talk to your doctor about these before you begin taking them.



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

THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF HEART FAILURE MEDICATIONS

Medication	Names of Medication	What the Medication Does
Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Captopril (Capoten) • Enalapril (Vasotec) • Fosinopril (Monopril) • Lisinopril (Prinivil, Zestril) • Perindopril (Aceon) • Quinapril (Accupril) • Ramipril (Altace) • Trandolapril (Mavik) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps lower your blood pressure, makes it easier for your heart to pump blood • Helps your heart failure even when you don't have high blood pressure
Beta blockers (also known as beta-adrenergic blocking agents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bisoprolol (Zebeta) • Metoprolol succinate (Toprol XL) • Carvedilol (Coreg) • Carvedilol CR (Coreg CR) • Toprol XL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can make your heart stronger even when you don't have high blood pressure • Helps the heart beat more slowly and lowers blood pressure
Angiotensin II receptor blockers (or inhibitors) Also known as ARBs or angiotensin-2 receptor antagonists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candesartan (Atacand) • Losartan (Cozaar) • Valsartan (Diovan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps lower your blood pressure, makes it easier for your heart to pump blood • Helps your heart failure even when you don't have high blood pressure
Angiotensin-receptor neprilysin inhibitors (ARNIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacubitril/valsartan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARNIs are a new drug combination of a neprilysin inhibitor and an ARB. • Helps your heart beat stronger
I _f channel blocker (or inhibitor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ivabradine (Corlanor) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This drug class reduces the heart rate, similar to another class of drugs called beta blockers.
Aldosterone antagonists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spironolactone (Aldactone) • Eplerenone (Inspra) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps get rid of extra fluid and salt from the body
Hydralazine and isosorbide dinitrate (specifically benefits African-Americans with heart failure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hydralazine and isosorbide dinitrate (combination drug) - (Bidil) • Isosorbide dinitrate (Isordil) • Isosorbide mononitrate (ISMO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps lower your blood pressure by relaxing the blood vessel walls
Diuretics (also known as water pills)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furosemide (Lasix) • Bumetanide (Bumex) • Torsemide (Demadex) • Chlorothiazide (Diuril) • Amiloride (Midamor) • Chlorthalidone (Hygroton) • Hydrochlorothiazide or HCTZ (Esidrix, Hydrodiuril) • Indapamide (Lozol) • Metolazone (Zaroxolyn) • Triamterene (Dyrenium) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps get rid of extra fluid and salt from the body
Lanoxin (Digoxin)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps the heart to pump more strongly
Sodium-glucose cotransporter-2 (SGLT2) inhibitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dapagliflozin (Farixga) • Empagliflozin (Jardiance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May help prevent heart failure hospitalizations as well as helping you maintain your blood sugar

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 stops, this device can help it 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 ongoing therapy in patients who are not eligible for a transplant. These devices are for 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 patients with end-stage heart failure who meet the selection criteria after a formal evaluation.

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.

Secondhand smoke is also harmful, so stay away from places where you may breathe in secondhand smoke.

IMPORTANT FACT: Quitting smoking may be the most important thing you can do to help your heart.





ALCOHOL AND HEART FAILURE

Alcohol makes it harder for the heart to work. Your health care provider may tell you to stop drinking alcohol altogether. Ask your health care provider if it is safe for you to drink alcohol.

INTIMATE RELATIONS AND HEART FAILURE

Heart failure may affect how much energy you have to do 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 about 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.

The following are tips to help you enjoy your sex life.

- Pick a time for sex when you feel rested and calm.
- Avoid sex after a large meal.
- Use foreplay to help your heart get used to the increased activity.
- Avoid positions in which you must support your weight with your arms. You may need to try less taxing positions for sex, such as lying on the bottom or with you and your partner lying side by side.
- If intercourse is too hard for you, try to find other ways to be close with your partner.



DEALING WITH STRESS

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

Chronic stress disrupts nearly all systems in your body. It can raise blood pressure, suppress the immune system, and increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, and heart failure. Long-term stress can even rewire the brain, causing more 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 such as reading a book and 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, such as rush hour traffic or being late.

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



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 approaches. 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, and 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 or 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 other chronic diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, heart failure, or diabetes
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Weight gain or loss
- Fatigue (lack of energy)
- Anxiety, agitation, irritability
- Thoughts of suicide or death
- Slow speech or slow movements
- Headache, stomach ache, or digestive problems

IF YOU HAVE THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE OR HURTING YOURSELF OR OTHERS, SEEK IMMEDIATE PROFESSIONAL HELP.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES AT A GLANCE

IMPORTANT FACT: Working with your health care provider to come up with a treatment plan will help you better stick to your daily regimen. If you are having difficulty following any part of the plan, discuss it with your health care provider.

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 reduce the chance of your heart failure symptoms getting worse.

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 weight, it makes your heart failure worse and can lead to swelling.

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 accurate 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 next to your scale. Step on the scale each morning after you empty your bladder. Weigh before eating or drinking. Always weigh in the same clothing or with 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.

IMPORTANT FACT: Ask your health care provider when you should call and what you should do when you gain weight.

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT WITH DIET AND EXERCISE

Eating a healthy diet that is low in sodium and low in cholesterol and fats can help you control your heart failure. It is important to maintain a healthy weight by eating fewer calories if you are overweight and more calories if you are underweight.

Exercise may help you maintain that healthy weight. Exercise is also part of helping your heart become stronger. Increase your exercise to 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 include pain in the 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.

LIMIT ALCOHOL

Stop or limit drinking alcohol. Ask your health care provider if it is safe for you to drink alcohol.

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. Remember to wash your hands often.



WHEN TO CALL YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER (DOCTOR, NURSE)

You should keep 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 more than 3 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in a week.
- 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 or 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.

THE HEART FAILURE TEAM AND MY CONTACT NUMBERS



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