

Heart failure – self management tips



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What is heart failure?

Heart failure occurs when the heart is weakened and cannot pump enough blood for the body's needs. This results in a backup of fluid throughout the body. There are several different causes of heart failure, the most common being coronary artery disease, previous damage to the heart muscle or valves, high blood pressure, and viral infections.

Understanding heart failure

What is the treatment for heart failure?

Lifestyle changes and medical treatment can improve symptoms and prevent further loss of heart function.

Common treatments

Medications that respond to the unique needs of the individual with heart failure are available. Management of underlying conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure can be beneficial.

Lifestyle changes as outlined in this brochure will help you do everything you can to manage your condition.

Living with heart failure is a team effort

No matter what approach is recommended, cooperation with a healthcare team is vital. Family members and friends can also provide support, reminders and encouragement. It is important to be alert to changes that might signal a worsening of heart failure and to notify your healthcare provider.

See the next page for a helpful checklist.

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People with heart failure may experience:

- Shortness of breath, even during mild activity
- Difficulty breathing when lying down
- Weight gain from fluid retention with swelling of feet, ankles and abdomen
- General fatigue and weakness

How can you manage your condition?

Our checklist can guide you if you've experienced heart failure.

Medical

Am I under regular medical care?

Yes No

It's vital that a physician monitor your heart health, medications and lifestyle. Keep all your appointments and bring along any questions.

Do I take my medications as directed?

Yes No

Medications for heart failure can only work if taken correctly – the right amount, at the right time, and in the right way.

Do I weigh myself every day?

Yes No

Weight increases can be a sign of increased fluid retention. Report a gain of over two pounds in a day, or five pounds in a week. Weigh yourself at the same time each day.

Are my immunizations up to date?

Yes No

Flu and pneumonia are especially dangerous for people with heart failure. Be sure you are immunized and avoid people with communicable diseases.

Nutrition

Do I restrict my sodium (salt) intake?

Yes No

Sodium increases water retention, which puts extra strain on the heart. Ask your doctor how to reduce sodium in your diet.

Do I avoid cholesterol and saturated fat?

Yes No

Cholesterol and saturated fat contribute to coronary artery disease, a major cause of heart failure. Find out about "heart smart" cooking, and read the labels on packaged products.

Health & well-being

Am I a smoker?

Yes No

Tobacco damages the blood vessels and puts extra strain on the heart. If you smoke, ask your healthcare provider about smoking cessation programs.

Do I drink alcohol?

Yes No

Alcoholic beverages can weaken the heart and may interact negatively with your medications. Ask for help if controlling your alcohol intake is a problem.

Do I get enough exercise, and the right kind of exercise?

Yes No

For most heart failure patients, regular exercise can help the heart pump more efficiently – but it's important to follow an exercise program that is right for you. Do not begin an exercise program without consulting your physician first.

Do I get enough sleep – and make time for resting during the day?

Yes No

Rest periods are recommended to give the heart a chance to work more easily.

Am I stressed?

Yes No

Stress and anxiety put strain on the heart. Develop relaxation strategies and eliminate stressful situations from your life.

Note: It is important to be alert to changes that might signal a worsening of heart failure and to notify your healthcare provider.

The guidelines suggested here do not substitute for directions provided by your healthcare professional.

VNA Care Network & Hospice's **home health care** services help people live independently while dealing with health concerns. To learn more, call **800-728-1862**.

For **Lifeline**, call Carol Potter today at **800-521-5539, x5459**.