

Living with Heart Failure

Your heart pumps blood through your body and carries oxygen and nutrients where they are needed. Veins return blood from your body into the right side of your heart where the blood is then pumped into your lungs to “pick up” oxygen. From your lungs, the blood moves to the left side of your heart where it is pumped out through arteries to all parts of your body.

Heart Failure is a medical condition where the heart doesn't pump blood as well as it should.

Heart failure may be caused by clogged arteries, diseased heart valves, high blood pressure, heart defects present since birth, damage to the heart muscle from a past heart attack, or infections of the heart or its valves. In some cases the cause of heart failure is unknown.

Controlling heart failure is usually achieved through a combination of medication, changes in diet, and exercise. To improve your condition you may have to change your diet, lifestyle and level of physical activity.

You are the most important member of your team helping to manage your heart failure. The closer you work with your team, the better you will do.



You can take the best care of yourself by doing the following five things:

1. Weigh yourself every morning

Do this after urinating and before eating and drinking. Wear the same clothing when you weigh yourself.

2. Take the medications your doctor prescribes on a regular schedule. These medications can prolong your life and make you feel better by helping your heart pump better and avoiding buildup of fluid in your body. Do not stop taking your medication unless instructed by your doctor to do so – even if you are feeling better. Most people can take medications without side effects. However, if you experience side effects, let your doctor or nurse know.

3. Reduce your intake of salt (sodium), in all its forms, by getting rid of the salt shaker and by carefully reading food labels. Excess sodium makes your body retain fluid which makes your heart and kidneys work harder.

Ask us for tips on foods and cooking methods that reduce sodium without reducing flavor. Be careful when you eat at restaurants – ask for a low salt meal.

4. Exercise in moderation to improve your muscle tone, control your weight and improve your overall sense of well-being. Regular exercise at a comfortable pace helps your heart work better. Follow your doctor's or nurse's guidelines for the best type of exercise and length of exercise session for your condition. Be sure to wear comfortable shoes, warm up and cool down, and keep your highest heart rate no more than 30 beats higher than your resting heart rate.

5. You should call your doctor if you experience these warning signs:

- A sudden gain of three pounds within two days or five pounds within a week.
- Swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, hands or abdomen.
- Difficulty sleeping because it's hard for you to breathe.
- Shortness of breath during your normal daily routine.
- You have a hacking cough, especially when you lie down.

IF YOU ARE EXTREMELY SHORT OF BREATH OR HAVE CHEST PAIN, CALL 911.