

Tips for Your Heart Failure

You should have follow up appointments with your doctor at least every 3 to 6 months and tests to check your heart function.

An ultrasound of your heart (echocardiogram) will be done once in awhile to see how well your heart pumps blood with each beat.

You will need to carefully monitor yourself and help manage your condition. One important way to do this is to track your weight on a daily basis. Weigh yourself at the same time each day and on the same scale, with little to no clothes on.

Weight gain can be a sign that your body is holding onto extra fluid and your heart failure is worsening. Talk to your doctor about what you should do if your weight goes up or if you develop more symptoms.

Other important measures include:

- Take your medications as directed. Carry a list of medications with you wherever you go.
- Limit salt intake.
- Do not smoke.
- Stay active. For example, walk or ride a stationary bicycle. Your doctor can provide a safe and effective exercise plan for your degree of heart failure. **DO NOT** exercise on days that your weight has gone up from fluid retention or you are not feeling well.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Get enough rest, including after exercise, eating, or other activities. This allows your heart to rest as well. Keep your feet elevated to decrease swelling.

Here are some tips to lower your salt and sodium intake:

- Look for foods that are labeled “low-sodium,” “sodium-free,” “no salt added,” or “unsalted.” Check the total sodium content on food labels. Be especially careful of canned, packaged, and frozen foods. A nutritionist can teach you how to understand these labels.

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- Don't cook with salt or add salt to what you are eating. Try pepper, garlic, lemon, or other spices for flavor instead. Be careful of packaged spice blends as these often contain salt or salt products (like monosodium glutamate, MSG).
- Avoid foods that are naturally high in sodium, like anchovies, meats (particularly cured meats, bacon, hot dogs, sausage, bologna, ham, and salami), nuts, olives, pickles, sauerkraut, soy and Worcestershire sauces, tomato and other vegetable juices, and cheese.
- Take care when eating out. Stick to steamed, grilled, baked, boiled, and broiled foods with no added salt, sauce, or cheese.
- Use oil and vinegar, rather than bottled dressings, on salads.
- Eat fresh fruit or sorbet when having dessert.

Medications

Your doctor may prescribe the following medications:

- ACE inhibitors such as captopril, enalapril, lisinopril, and ramipril to open up blood vessels and decrease the work load of the heart
- Diuretics including hydrochlorothiazide, chlorthalidone, chlorothiazide, furosemide, torsemide, bumetanide, and spironolactone to help rid your body of fluid and salt (sodium)
- Digitalis glycosides to help the heart muscle to contract properly and help treat some heart rhythm disturbances
- Angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs) such as losartan and candesartan for those who have side effects with ACE inhibitors
- Beta-blockers such as carvedilol and metoprolol, which may be helpful for some patients

Certain medications may make heart failure worse and should be avoided. These include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, thiazolidinediones, metformin, cilostazol, PDE-5 inhibitors (sildenafil, vardenafil), and many drugs that treat abnormal heart rhythms.

Source: Indiana Chronic Disease Management Program