

Heart Failure: Your Guide to Self-Care

If you have heart failure, there's a lot to do to take good care of yourself.

Over time, you'll learn more about the kinds of things that can keep your heart working as well as possible. This guide will get you started.

Take your medicines the right way

Medicines can help slow heart failure, help you feel better, and help keep you out of the hospital. Medicines may also help you live longer. Here are some ways to help you keep track of your medicines and stay safe.

- Keep a list of all your medicines.
- Find a way to make taking your medicines a part of your routine. You might try a pill box or a phone alarm.
- Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with any of your medicines.
- Talk to your doctor before you stop or change any medicine.
- Make sure your doctor knows about any vitamins, over-the-counter drugs, or herbal products that you take.
- Have a list of safe over-the-counter medicines you can take. Your doctor or pharmacist can help with this.

Check symptoms every day

Tracking your symptoms can help you feel more in control—and know when to call your doctor.

Here are some tips:

- Weigh yourself at the same time each day, in the same clothes. Call your doctor if you notice a sudden weight gain, such as more



than 2 to 3 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in a week. (Your doctor may suggest a different range of weight gain.)

- Write down changes in your symptoms, like shortness of breath or swollen ankles.
- Take your record of symptoms and weight when you visit your doctor.

Limit sodium

Sodium causes your body to hold on to water and may make your symptoms worse.

Your doctor may suggest that you limit sodium. Your doctor can tell you how much sodium is right for you.

Here are a few tips to adjust to less salt:

- Take the salt shaker off your table.
- Add half the salt a recipe asks for.
- Read food labels. Keep in mind that serving sizes on the labels are often smaller than what you actually eat.

- Use fresh or frozen ingredients instead of canned ones whenever you can. Choose low-sodium canned goods.
- Eat fewer processed foods and food from restaurants, including fast food.

Sodium can come in different forms, including monosodium glutamate (MSG), sodium citrate, and sodium bicarbonate (baking soda).

Eat heart-healthy

What you put in your body affects the health of your heart **and** how you feel.

Here are some ways to eat heart-healthy:

- Eat vegetables, fruits, nuts, beans, and whole grains.
- Choose foods that are low in saturated fat.
- Choose lean meats such as fish and skinless poultry.
- Limit sugary drinks and foods.
- Limit or avoid alcohol. Ask your doctor how much alcohol, if any, is safe for you.

Stay well

Do your best to prioritize your health.

- Get recommended vaccines. These include vaccines for COVID-19, the flu, and pneumonia.
- If you think you might have a problem with alcohol or drug use, talk to your doctor.

- Limit fluids if your doctor tells you to.
- Be kind to yourself. Dealing with heart failure can be tough.

Be active

The heart is a muscle and you can make it stronger by exercising.

Exercise can also give you more energy, lift your mood, keep you independent, and reduce your symptoms.

Here are some tips for being active:

- Ask your doctor to help you make an activity plan. A plan will keep you active and safe.
- Exercise regularly, but not too hard.
- During exercise, watch for signs that your heart is working too hard, like if you can't talk. If you become short of breath or dizzy or have chest pain, stop, sit down, and rest.

Did you know?

Feeling anxious or depressed is not unusual for people with heart failure.

But there are medicines and types of counseling that can help you feel better.

Talk with your doctor about what type of treatment might be best for you.