

Simple Steps to Stay Healthy with Heart Failure



Although heart failure is a serious condition, there are steps you can take to manage your life and live well.

The heart's job is to pump blood to carry oxygen and nutrients to the rest of the body, and keep your organs healthy. If your heart has been damaged from a heart attack, high blood pressure, alcohol, or a valve problem, it doesn't pump as well as it should. When it's not able to pump the normal amount of blood throughout the body, fluid is retained in the legs, abdomen, and eventually the lungs. This is called heart failure.

Although heart failure is a serious condition, there are steps you can take to manage your life and live well, including:

- Weigh yourself every day at the same time, preferably first thing in the morning after emptying your bladder. Record your weight on a daily weight log.
- Take all medications prescribed by your heart failure care team.
- Eat less sodium (salt) each day.
- Be physically active every day to reduce fatigue, increase your energy, and help your heart work better.
- Check and record your blood pressure and pulse rate each day. If you have diabetes, check your blood sugar as recommended.
- Track your heart failure symptoms each day.
- Monitor your fluid intake daily.
- Quit smoking.

Why do I need to weigh myself every day?

Sudden or steady weight gain can be an early warning sign that your body is retaining fluid. This can make heart failure worse. By weighing yourself daily, you can keep track of any weight changes related to extra fluid. This will help you take action to prevent a hospital stay.

My usual (dry) weight is _____.

How much sodium do I need?

Most people eat about 4,000 milligrams (mg) of sodium (salt) a day. When you have heart failure, we recommend you eat 2,300 mg of sodium a day (or less). Ask your doctor, care manager, or dietitian what your daily sodium target is.

My sodium target is _____.

How do I cut down on sodium?

- Choose fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other healthy foods low in sodium.
- Avoid processed foods, like canned or frozen foods, or meals and condiments like ketchup or soy sauce. Beware of foods labeled “smoked,” “cured,” or “pickled.” These foods contain a lot of sodium.
- Don't add salt to food. Enhance flavors with no-salt seasonings, such as garlic powder, pepper, or other spices and herbs.
- Buy a low-salt cookbook to get ideas on preparing food with less salt.
- Choose restaurants that offer low-sodium foods, or ask your server to have your food prepared without added salt.

What should I read on the food label?

Always check the amount of sodium in foods (both meals and snacks) you plan to eat. Also check the ingredients. If the word “salt,” “sodium,” or monosodium glutamate (MSG) is listed, then it contains sodium.

In the example below, this food contains 680 mg of sodium for a serving size of one tamale. If you eat 2 tamales, then you’re eating 1,360 mg of sodium. A good goal is to look for foods that have 140 mg or less of sodium per serving size or 500 mg or less of sodium per meal.

Why is physical activity important for my heart failure?

Being physically active will help your heart work better and help you feel better overall. Start slowly by walking for 5 to 15 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day. Gradually, increase your activity to about 30 to 60 minutes a day. Rest when you feel tired.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 Tamale (142g)	
Servings per container 2	
Amount per Serving	
Calories 320	Calories from Fat 180
<hr/>	
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 20g	30%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Cholesterol 25mg	8%
Sodium 680mg	29%
Total Carbohydrate 24g	11%

Do I have to watch how much fluid I drink each day, as well?

Your doctor may ask you to limit fluids to help prevent swelling, especially in the legs, hands, and abdominal area. This means monitoring what you eat or drink, such as coffee, soup, and foods that turn liquid at room temperature, like ice chips, popsicles, and ice cream.

Some people may only be able to drink about 48 ounces (about 6 cups) of fluids per day, while others may be able to have as much as 64 ounces (8 cups) daily.

My daily fluid target is _____ ounces/cups.

When my heart failure symptoms get worse than normal, who do I call?

Call 911 or go to the nearest hospital if you have any of the following symptoms:*

- Severe shortness of breath
- Coughing up pink, frothy sputum
- Chest discomfort, pain, or pressure that does not go away with rest or by using nitroglycerin, if already prescribed for you.

Call your doctor or heart failure care team right away if any of the following symptoms get worse or if they are new for you:

- Sudden weight gain of 2 or more pounds in one day, or 5 or more pounds in a week
- Shortness of breath (at rest or with activity)
- Increased swelling of your feet, legs, or abdominal area
- Difficulty breathing when you lie down
- Waking up from sleep panting or breathing rapidly
- New or worsening dizziness, lightheadedness, fainting, or “passing out” (loss of consciousness)
- Cough that doesn’t go away
- New or increasing irregularities in your heart rate
- Any problems with your medications

Additional resources

For more information, tools, classes, and other resources:

- Search kp.org/mydoctor
- Contact your local Health Education Department

* If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. When you have an emergency medical condition, we cover emergency care from Plan providers and non-Plan providers anywhere in the world.

An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or serious impairment or dysfunction of your bodily functions or organs; or, (2) when you are in active labor and there isn’t enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to you or your unborn child’s health and safety.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

Some photos may include models and not actual patients.