



HEART & LUNG CENTER

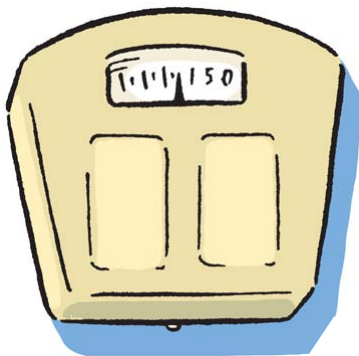
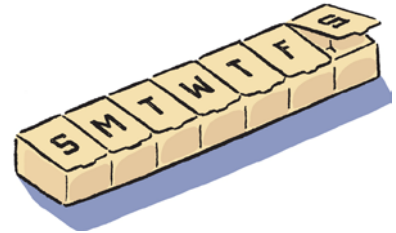
What Can I Do to Manage Heart Failure?

Although heart failure cannot be cured, it can be managed well. Your treatment plan may include medicines, surgery, implantable medical devices, or a combination of these approaches. There are also a lot of things you can do to help improve your condition. Together with proper medical care and careful monitoring, good self-care can help you feel better, stay out of the hospital, and live a longer life.

To manage your heart failure, it is best if you do the following:

Take your medicines regularly as prescribed by your doctor.

When the medicines that your doctor has prescribed are taken regularly and at the correct doses, they can make you feel better, reduce hospitalizations, and help you live longer. Experts in heart failure call many of these medicines “lifesaving.” Since your medication is very important, when traveling, keep your medication in your carry-on luggage and bring it with you on the plane. It is helpful to keep your medicine organized, and remember to refill your prescriptions before you travel so that they do not run out.



Weigh yourself every day and write it down.

Daily changes in weight are usually the result of water weight. By weighing yourself every day at the same time, you can help monitor whether your body is retaining fluid due to heart failure. Even though you may feel the same, a gain of just 3 to 4 pounds over a few days is a sign of worsening congestion that must be treated. If treated, your heart and lungs can function more easily and you may feel more comfortable. If left untreated, it may become more serious and require hospitalization.

Follow a low-sodium (low-salt) diet.

Heart failure can cause your body to retain sodium and result in fluid buildup. The extra fluid makes your heart work harder and your symptoms get worse.

A low-sodium diet generally means that you eat no more than about 2,000 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day. That amount is less than 1 teaspoon of salt from all sources, including the salt that is already in your food.

To reduce the sodium in your diet, stop adding additional salt to your food. Avoid processed foods –especially canned, boxed, or bagged foods – and eat more fresh vegetables and fruit. Be sure to review the nutritional information labels on all packaged foods for sodium content, and decrease the total amount of salt you eat per day. Pay close attention when eating at restaurants. Many restaurants will tell you nutritional information of foods if you ask. They will hold salt when cooking if you ask and will serve salad dressing and sauces/gravies on the side. Also pay attention to certain foods that contain a large amount of water, such as head lettuce or watermelon. Although following a low-sodium diet might be a challenge, by following the diet recommended by your doctor or nurse you will gain better control of your condition.



Get regular physical activity.

Heart failure can make you feel tired. One of the ways to feel better is to keep physically active through a regular exercise program. In general, start slowly and increase your exercise gradually. Talk to your doctor about an exercise program that is best for you. Exercise can be a highly valuable plan to improve your condition.

Quit smoking.

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your heart and overall health. Smoking damages your blood vessels, increases your blood pressure, and causes lung disease in addition to other problems. Quitting smoking is strongly recommended for all people with heart disease, including heart failure. Talk to your doctor or nurse about new methods for helping people quit smoking.



Stay connected socially.

Your family and friends can help. Don't keep your condition a secret. Let your family and friends support you and help you stay with your treatment plan. Having an active social life can also help keep your mind off your problems and give you a more positive outlook on life. Participating in activities that you enjoy reminds you of why you want

to take good care of yourself and stay healthy. Plan some fun activities that will reduce stress and give you energy.

Monitor your symptoms daily and learn when to call your doctor.

You know your heart failure symptoms best. Write down when you notice your symptoms are getting better or worse, or when you develop new symptoms. This information can help alert you as to when you should call your doctor and can also help your doctor make changes to your treatment.

Feel free to ask your doctor and nurse any questions you might have about your treatment plan.



Adapted by the SCA Prevention Medical Advisory Team from the IMPROVE HF registry toolkit.
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