

Living with Heart Failure

Patient & Family Information



ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL

"Living with Heart Failure"
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INTRODUCTION

You may have noticed that you have been overly short of breath, have had a lot of swelling or puffiness, or have had difficulty lying flat in bed at night.

Your doctor has told you that you have heart failure.

Your first reaction may have been one of surprise or disbelief – heart failure is such a strong word!

Having heart failure does not mean that your heart is going to stop working.

Heart failure simply means **your heart is not pumping as well as it used to**. There are many people who are able to live near normal lives with heart failure by following a few lifestyle changes. These changes will be presented in this book.

It is very possible to lead a happy and productive life even though you have been told you have heart failure. It will involve taking an active role in controlling those things in your life that have fallen out of balance and working closely with your healthcare provider.

Remember, this book is only a guide. You must always follow the advice of your doctor.

Let's move on to some of the things that you can do to make living with heart failure easier! You CAN do it!

WHAT CAUSES HEART FAILURE?

Heart Failure develops when something has caused damage to the heart muscle, making it weaker. Some things that can cause damage are:

- a. **High Blood Pressure** – the heart has to pump against higher pressure. This higher pressure may come from arteries that are clogged with fatty deposits. Over time this extra work can cause the heart to fail.
- b. **Coronary Artery Disease** – blood vessels that supply blood to the heart muscle become blocked, weakening the heart muscle.
- c. **Heart Attack** – blood cannot get to a part of the heart muscle, damaging the muscle. This damage can be permanent.
- d. **Abnormal Valves** – a heart valve no longer opens or closes completely during each heartbeat. This can be present at birth or can develop later in life from other causes.
- e. **Other conditions** such as cardiomyopathy (enlarged heart), severe lung infections, heart defects from birth and heart rhythm problems can also cause heart failure.

TESTS THAT MAY BE DONE

Your doctor will examine you and ask you questions. He may want to do tests to better understand the function of your heart and to see if there are any underlying conditions that have caused your heart to weaken. A personalized plan of treatment for you will be based on this evaluation.

A ***chest x-ray*** will show the size of your heart and if there is fluid around your heart and lungs.

An ***echocardiogram (ECHO)*** is a painless test using sound waves (ultrasound). It gives a view of the heart valves and shows the strength of the heart muscle and how efficiently it acts as a pump. The echo also shows if your heart is enlarged and shows the thickness of the heart walls.

You may also have an ***electrocardiogram (EKG)*** or be asked to wear a ***Holter monitor*** for a period of time. These tests record the electrical activity of the heart as well as the heart rhythm.

Stress Tests show how your heart responds to exercise.

Nuclear Scans can tell how your heart is functioning and show weakened or damaged areas of the heart muscle or areas of poor oxygen supply.

Cardiac Catheterization may be done to identify blocked arteries, diseased valves, or weakened heart muscle.

Electrophysiologic Testing may be recommended to evaluate irregular heart rhythms or risk for dangerous heart rhythms.

Blood tests may be required after discharge to determine effects of medication (i.e.: Spironolactone can raise potassium levels).

PLANNING YOUR TREATMENT

Treatment for heart failure is specific to your needs. It is designed to relieve some of your symptoms and help you to be more comfortable. Treatment involves lifestyle changes and may include the following:

Daily Weight to identify early changes in water retention

Diet Changes to reduce salt / sodium and fat / cholesterol

Activity and Exercise to help you feel better

Rest to let your heart rest, too

Medications to help your heart work better

Other lifestyle changes such as *stop smoking and avoid alcohol*

Regular visits to your doctor so he can make sure that your treatment plan stays right for you.

Now, here's where you come in!!! Remember the active participation part?

WEIGHING DAILY

Every person with heart failure should purchase a scale if they do not have one. Weigh yourself daily, preferably at the same time each day, using the same scale, and wearing the same amount of clothing. If you choose to weigh yourself in the morning, weigh after urinating and before eating. (This is the best time to weigh yourself as it will provide you with “dry weight” = your weight without excess fluids in your body.) Call your doctor if you have a 2-3 pound weight gain over night or have a gain of 5 or more pounds in one week. This amount of weight increase in a short time may mean that you are retaining extra fluid. This makes it harder for your heart to work. Your doctor may want to adjust the medications you are taking to help you get rid of the extra fluids and assist your heart with its pumping work.

Limit fluids to **8** (eight ounce) **glasses** per day OR **64 ounces** per day (unless otherwise instructed by your physician). Fluids include things that are liquid at room temperature (juice, water, popsicle, ice cream, etc.) Sugar-free hard candy may help ease a dry mouth.

At the end of this book is a calendar / activity record to help start you on the right track of recording your weight daily. Feel free to take this calendar with you when you visit your doctor. Be sure that you include a list of the medications you are taking. It will help the doctor evaluate your treatment.

You will also notice in your hospital stay that you are weighed daily so your doctor can adjust your medications as needed.

SODIUM IN YOUR DIET

Whether you have high blood pressure, have had a heart attack or heart failure, OR just want to turn to a healthier lifestyle, diet moderation is extremely important! However, the most important change for one who has heart failure is to **LIMIT SODIUM**

INTAKE! *One teaspoon of salt contains 2300 milligrams of SODIUM!* The American Heart Association recommends a daily sodium intake of between 2000 – 2400 milligrams for the general population and less than 1500 milligrams for the person with heart failure.

One of the easiest things to do to limit your sodium intake is to REMOVE the salt shaker from the table. You may want to replace the salt shaker with a mixture of crushed herb seasonings or salt-free seasoning mix. Use lemon juice, vinegar, honey, and garlic to bring out the flavor of foods.

Here is a list of some high sodium foods you want to try to AVOID:

(the * items are available in low or no salt / sodium forms)

Anchovies	Pepperoni
Bacon	Pickles
Bouillon Cubes*	Pizza
Cheese (except cottage)*	Popcorn* (salted)
Chips*	Salt (ANY)
Crackers* (salted)	Sauces (prepared)*
Ketchup*	Salad Dressing*
Lunchmeat (Ham, Bologna)	Sauerkraut
Meat Tenderizers	Soup (canned)*
Nuts* (salted)	Soy Sauce
Olives	Tomato juice*
Pastrami	Worcestershire sauce*

Learn to read labels on foods you eat. Observe for sodium content. Watch portions used. Be careful of “low salt” and “no salt” foods. They often use potassium instead of sodium which can be harmful for someone with both heart and kidney disease. Also, since they are not sodium free they may provide too much sodium if not used in moderation. Check the labels or ask your doctor or nutritionalist.

When dining out, it is best to tell the waiter that you cannot have salt for health reasons. Have food grilled, broiled, or baked without salt or soy. Fresh fruits and vegetables are always safe. Limit the amount of canned foods you eat. Rinse them when you do eat them. Ask for a low sodium salad dressing or use lemon juice or bottled vinegar and oil.

FAT AND CHOLESTEROL IN YOUR DIET

The second area to look at in your diet is to limit intake of fat and cholesterol. Be sure that when you use low-fat items they contain lite-salt or no salt. Basic guidelines include:

- Use vegetable (monosaturated or polyunsaturated) fats instead of saturated fats; recommended oils are olive and canola
- Avoid saturated fats (butter, coconut, and palm oils) as well as high fat dairy and meat products
- Limit egg yolks to three per week
- Limit organ meats
- Choose whole grain breads and cereals instead of white processed foods

** If you have questions about sodium, fat, and cholesterol restriction or other diet questions, please ask to see a dietitian who can best help you plan proper meals.

SMOKING AND ALCOHOL

If you smoke, **STOP COMPLETELY**. It is not enough to just cut back. Smoking damages the blood vessels, cuts down the amount of oxygen in the blood and makes the heart work harder. Second-hand smoke is harmful, too. Avoid being around anyone who smokes. Pick a date to quit. Line up support – family, friends, or a support group. Avoid situations that make you want to smoke. Ask others to not smoke around you.

If quitting smoking is difficult for you, ask your doctor to suggest a stop-smoking program to help you quit.

Alcohol in small amounts may or may not be acceptable for you. Ask your doctor about whether or not alcohol is right for you and what type.

Many medications interact with alcohol.

As a general rule, alcohol is not recommended when the heart muscle is weak.

Speak with your physician regarding information on quitting smoking. Additional smoking cessation information can be found at:

St. Joseph's Hospital Community Health. *Freedom From Smoking* (7 week American Lung Association program)
Phone: (813) 870-4747.

The American Lung Association. Phone: (800)-LUNG USA or (800) 586-4872. Web Site: www.lungusa.org.

The American Cancer Society. Phone: (800) - ACS-2345 or (800) 227-2345. Web Site: www.cancer.org

ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE

One of the best “medicines” for the heart is activity and exercise. However, you must talk to your doctor before starting any exercise program.

Good things that exercise can do:

- increase your energy by increasing the flow of oxygen and blood in the body
- help you sleep better at night
- help combat depression
- help you lose weight
- help improve self-confidence and attitude

The ideal exercise for people with heart failure is moderate walking, stationary bicycling, or swimming. It is best to avoid heavy jogging or weight lifting or anything that can put a strain on your heart. Start off slowly and if at any time you feel chest pain, shortness of breath or extreme tiredness, stop immediately and rest. You may want to have two or three short exercise periods instead of one big one if this is easier for you. Remember, the most important thing is to BALANCE activity with rest periods. Plan your activities for those days when you feel best. Take a walk, visit a friend, do a little shopping. Know your limits and plan accordingly.

It is important to exercise under the right conditions. If it is very cold or hot, you could become tired too quickly. You may want to exercise indoors at a shopping mall or gym. Also, it is best to wait at least one hour after eating to give your food time to digest.

If you have questions, contact: St. Joseph's Hospital
Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation at 870-4844 and press extension 2.

RELAXATION AND EMOTIONS

It is very important to relax! A short nap or rest period with your feet up, yoga, or meditation can help decrease stress and increase relaxation.

Feelings of anger, depression, fear or sadness may be present and are normal. You may not be able to do the things you used to do to cope with hard times, like smoking, eating fatty foods or doing heavy exercise. These stressful feelings and frustrations can lead to irritability and being short tempered with those around you.

Let the people around you know how you feel. Talk about your feelings and needs. Let family and friends help. They are very important to your wellbeing. Learn to lean on each other for support and fun. Remember that heart failure affects not only the person who has it but everyone around, especially those who care about you.

Ask the doctor what you can do to help you over the rough spots if negative feelings persist.

MEDICATIONS

It is very important that you take your medications the right way. The most important thing you can do for your heart is to take all of your medicines as prescribed for you. Do not stop taking one just because you feel better and do not increase the amount to help you feel better. If you forget to take one dose, restart with the next scheduled dose. (Do not double up on medication). If you have questions, call the pharmacist.

If you cannot afford your medications, talk to your doctor about getting some medications at a reduced cost.

Some ways to remember to take your medication on time are:

- Use a medicine calendar to note when you take a dose
- Use a daily event (like brushing your teeth) as a reminder to take your medication
- Divide your medicine in a pillbox
- Take medicine at the correct (same) time every day.

You may be taking one or more of these most common heart failure medications:

- **Aspirin**

Aspirin thins the blood so that it has an easier time flowing through arteries that may have small blockages in them. This also helps prevent blood clots from forming.

- **ACE Inhibitors**

Examples: *Lotensin, Capoten, Vasotec, Monopril, Zestril, Prinivil*
These drugs open up the blood vessels. This allows the blood to flow easier, making less work for the heart muscle. They also help the heart to be a stronger pump.

The ACE Inhibitors may cause dizziness, lightheadedness, cough, swelling or skin rash. Call your doctor immediately for swelling or persistent cough.

- **Angiotension Receptors**

These drugs are indicated if ACE Inhibitors are not tolerated and may cause hypotension, lightheadedness, and/or dizziness.

- **Aldactone**

This drug is used to improve heart function and may improve quality of life.

- **Diuretics (Water Pills)**

Examples: *Lasix, Bumex, Demadex, Hydrochlorothiazide, Zaroxolyn*

These drugs get rid of excess fluids that collect in the heart, lungs, and feet. You may want to avoid taking this medication at night. Water pills increase the amount of urine flow and this could disturb sleep. Some diuretics can cause a decrease in potassium and your doctor may put you on a potassium supplement. Diuretics can also cause dizziness when getting up from a sitting or lying position too quickly.

- **Digoxin**

Digoxin helps the heart to pump more strongly and can help to control the heart rhythm. It is important that the Digoxin level in your body stays within a normal range. Your doctor will probably monitor this by doing blood tests and watching for side effects of the drug.

There are things to watch for. If your Digoxin level is too high you may have loss of vision or blurred vision. You may see yellow/green halos around things you are looking at. Dizziness, muscle aches, or nausea / vomiting can also happen. A skin rash may develop. Call your doctor immediately.

- **Beta Blocker**

Examples: *Coreg, Toprol-XL*

These drugs help block certain substances that can damage the heart. At first you may feel this drug is not working or may be making you worse. By monitoring your weight and breathing and calling your doctor when you feel worse, you can be sure this drug will work properly. When your heart adjusts, you will feel better.

- **Vitamins, Diet Supplements, Herbals, and Other Medications**

Talk to your doctor before taking any of these health products or any over-the-counter product such as pain medications.

SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Sex is a normal part of life. In terms of exertion, sex is often compared to the energy it takes to climb 2 flights of stairs.

As with any activity, discuss sexual activity with your doctor. Make sure you are in a comfortable position and stop if you have chest pain or discomfort, severe shortness of breath, dizziness or nausea. Avoid sexual or any activity directly after eating or if you are fatigued.

If you take nitroglycerine for chest pain, you might be tempted to take it before sex to avoid symptoms. Also, it is best to avoid the use of sex-enhancing drugs such as Sildenafil (Viagra), Tadalafil (Cialis), or Vardenafil (Levitra). Talk to your doctor first.

Feelings of fear, sadness and depression can interfere with intimacy. Medications can also interfere with sexual desire. Talk to your partner. Communication is essential to understanding how each of you feels.

SIGNS OF WORSENING HEART FAILURE

If any of these signs occur or worsen, notify your doctor immediately. Call 9-1-1 if you cannot reach the doctor.

- You are unable to lie flat in bed
- You are waking in the middle of the night short of breath or coughing
- You gained 3 or more pounds in one day or 5 pounds in one week
- You have severe swelling of the feet, hands, and / or abdomen
- You are significantly more tired than usual – feel exhaustion with little activity

CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF

- Your symptoms get worse
- You notice new symptoms from your medications
- Breathing is more difficult
- You start to cough at night
- You have trouble sleeping
- You get tired faster than before
- You have a decreased appetite for food
- You urinate less often
- You gain 3 or more pounds in one day or 5 or more pounds in one week
- Your ankles, feet or abdomen swell more than usual
- You feel dizzy or faint
- You have chest tightness, discomfort, or pain

CALL 9-1-1 IF YOU FEEL BAD AND YOU CANNOT REACH YOUR DOCTOR

CALENDAR AND ACTIVITY RECORD

MONTH:

YEAR:

DATE	SALT INTAKE (Milligrams)	WEIGHT	MEDICINE TAKEN (YES/NO)	ACTIVITY	HOW I FEEL TODAY	REMINDERS
1						♥ Watch for inability to lie flat.
2						
3						
4						☺ Watch for shortness of breath.
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6						
7						☺ Weigh myself every day.
8						
9						
10						♥ Take my medications every day as prescribed.
11						
12						
13						☺ Limit my salt (sodium) intake.
14						
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16						☺ Watch for swelling.
17						
18						
19						☺ List of medicine I am taking: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
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