

## ***REACH CHF Ed. for ~ 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. 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 and better life.

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

### **Take your medicines regularly as prescribed by your doctor.**

Taking medicines regularly and at the correct doses can make you feel better, reduce hospitalizations, and help you live longer. Experts in heart failure call many of these medicines “lifesaving.” When traveling, make sure to 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 fluctuations in weight are usually the result of water weight. You should weigh yourself every day in the morning to monitor your body's fluid retention. 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 limiting your salt intake to 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.

You should 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. By regularly exercising, you can also reduce your risk of falling. Talk to your doctor about an exercise program that is best for you.

### **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 be very helpful. 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.

This is an evidence-based work flow algorithm to assist in optimizing patients' health status and clinical outcome. Please refer to the manufacturers' prescribing information and/or instructions for use for the indications, contraindications, warnings, and precautions associated with the medications and devices referenced in these materials.

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