

Simple Steps to Take to Stay Healthy with Heart Failure



Although heart failure is a serious condition, there are many steps that you can take to help yourself manage your life with heart failure.



The heart's job is to pump blood to your lungs where the blood takes on oxygen. The oxygen-rich blood is then pumped to other parts of your body. Oxygen is needed to keep your cells and tissues healthy. When your heart has been damaged—by a heart attack, high blood pressure, too much alcohol, a valve problem, or other condition—it doesn't pump as well as it should. As a result, your cells and tissues do not receive as much oxygen as they should, and your body holds onto fluid. This is called heart failure.

Although heart failure is a serious condition, there are many steps that you can take to help yourself better manage your life with heart failure. Try making these simple lifestyle changes:

- Weigh yourself every day at the same time. Record your weight on a daily weight log.
- Take all the medications that you are prescribed by your heart failure care team.
- Eat less sodium (salt) each day.
- Be physically active every day.
- 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. (See side 2 of this page.)
- Monitor your fluid intake daily.
- Stop 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 holding on to fluid. This fluid can make

your heart failure worse. By weighing yourself daily, you can keep track of any weight changes. This information may help you prevent a hospital stay by taking action sooner.

My usual weight is _____.

How much sodium do I need?

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

My sodium target is _____.

How do I cut down on sodium?

- Choose fresh foods more often, especially fruits and vegetables. These foods are usually low in sodium.
- Remove the salt shaker from the table and don't use it while you cook. You can learn to enhance the flavors of your meals by using no-salt seasonings, such as garlic powder, pepper, or other spices and herbs.
- If you plan to use a salt substitute, first discuss your options with your heart failure care team.
- Buy a low-salt cookbook to get ideas on preparing food with less salt.
- Choose restaurants that offer foods that are low in sodium and are prepared in a low-sodium way. You can call ahead to ask what they serve that is low in salt. You can also ask your server to have your food prepared without salt.
- Eat fewer processed foods, like canned foods, frozen foods, or meals and condiments like catsup or soy sauce.



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

Beware of foods labeled “smoked,” “cured,” or “pickled.” These foods contain a lot of sodium.

What should I read on the food label?

Always check the amount of sodium in the foods (meals and snacks) that you plan to eat. Also check the ingredients list. If the word “salt” or “sodium” or monosodium glutamate (MSG) is listed among the ingredients, then it is probably a food high in sodium.

In this example you see this food contains 680 mg of sodium for a serving size of one tamale. If you eat two tamales, then you are 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 at a comfortable pace for 5 to 15 minutes, two to three times a day. Gradually increase the amount of time you spend

being active to about 30 to 60 minutes a day. Be sure to rest when you feel tired.

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

Your health care professional may ask you to limit fluids to help you prevent swelling, especially in the legs, hands, and abdominal area. This means counting the amount (ounces) of anything that you eat or drink that is liquid, like coffee, soup, and foods that turn liquid at room temperature, like ice chips, pop-sicles, and ice cream. Some people may only be able to drink *about* 48 ounces (about 6 cups) a day while others may be able to take in as much as 64 ounces (8 cups) of fluids daily.

My daily fluid target is _____ ounces/cups.

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

Keeping track of your heart failure symptoms on a daily basis is also one of the most important things that you can do to take care of yourself when you have heart failure.

Call 911* or go to the nearest hospital if you have these emergency symptoms of heart failure:

- 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 physician or health care professional right away if the following symptoms get worse or if they are new for you:

- sudden weight gain of two or more pounds in one day or five 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 flat
- waking up from sleep because you are panting or breathing rapidly
- new or worsening dizziness, lightheadedness, fainting, or “passing out” (loss of consciousness)
- a cough that does not go away
- new or increasing irregularities in your heart rate
- any problems with your medications.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at members.kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, message boards, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- With a *Kaiser Permanente Healthphone Directory*, you can pick topics and messages to hear on Kaiser Permanente Healthphone (1-800-332-7563; TTY: 1-800-777-9059). Request a *Directory* from your Health Center or Department; or download a copy at members.kp.org. (Search “Healthphone”.)

*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.