

Putting it all Together: Living a Healthy Lifestyle



How can I start living a healthier lifestyle?

Your lifestyle and eating habits can help improve your heart failure symptoms, slow your disease progression and improve your everyday life. Below are some tips to get you started on the path to better health.

The **single** most important thing you can do for your heart is to **stop smoking**.

Stop Smoking

Quitting smoking will improve your heart health. Smoking has many harmful health effects:

- Decreases the oxygen supply to the heart muscle
- Causes artery wall damage
- Decreases HDL (good) cholesterol
- Increases heart rate and blood pressure
- Can contribute to problems with heart rhythm

You must decide to quit smoking. No one else can make you stop. You can gradually eliminate cigarettes or stop all at once.

Here are some tips to help:

- Set a date to quit.
- Get support from family and friends.
- Get support from your health care providers. For example, your doctor can sometimes prescribe medications that will aid you in your efforts to quit.
- Use substitutes – sugarless candy, crafts or even a short straw that you hold in your hand.

- Join a quit-smoking program – your doctor or local lung and heart associations can recommend one.
- Call the UM Tobacco Consultation Service for help at (734) 998-6222. The Michigan Tobacco Quit Line (800) 784-8669 is free to Michigan residents.
- If you fail to quit, try again - **You can do it!**

Achieve and maintain a healthy weight

Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is important for your health. It helps your body to function better, limiting the chance of future disease and discomfort. The easiest measure for assessing how your body weight is affecting your health is BMI or Body Mass Index. It is important to try to achieve a healthy BMI to reduce strain on your heart and keep your blood pressure under control. A phrase to remember that can help you is "move more and eat less". However, do not begin a weight loss program without consulting with your doctor. A dietitian can help you with meal planning and portion control.

Eat a healthy diet

A lifestyle that promotes a heart healthy diet helps you feel better and helps to manage your heart failure symptoms. Healthy eating starts with healthy food choices.

This eating plan should include a diet which is:

- High in fruits and vegetables
- High in whole grains
- High in legumes (peas and beans)
- High in skinless poultry, fish and low-fat dairy products
- Low in sodium
- Low in saturated fat and added sugars



Importance of Potassium

Potassium is a mineral that helps the heart work properly. Some heart failure medications can cause potassium levels to go either up or down. Your provider will tell you if you need to change your diet to keep your potassium level normal.

Reduce Sodium in Your Diet

Too much sodium in your diet can make your heart failure worse. Sodium acts like a sponge that holds fluids in your body. This extra fluid makes your heart work harder to pump blood throughout your body. One of the most effective ways to reduce extra fluid is to have less sodium in your diet. The nutrition plan for people with heart failure **limits the sodium you get from food and drink to 2,000 milligrams (2 grams) per day or less.**

Watch Cholesterol

Cholesterol can build up in the inner walls of your arteries. This causes your arteries to become clogged and narrowed which reduces your blood flow. Eating a healthy diet with a focus on eating foods low in saturated fats can help you control your cholesterol.

Please see the *Diet and Nutrition Guide for Heart Failure* in Chapter 3 of this binder for more detailed information on a healthy diet.

Limit alcohol

Your provider will talk to you about how much alcohol is safe for you to drink. Alcohol may limit the function of your heart muscle.

In general, you should follow these recommendations:

- **Do not** combine alcohol with your heart failure medications. Drinking alcohol prevents the medications from working effectively and may cause serious side effects.
- Limit alcohol to no more than 1 drink (12 oz. of a beer, 5 oz. of wine or 1.5 oz of hard liquor or distilled spirits) per day.
- **Do not** drink alcohol if you have a history of alcohol use disorder or alcohol related heart disease.
- Count alcoholic drinks as a part of your sodium and fluid intake.
- Remember alcohol does not provide any nutritional value to your diet.

Limit fluids

When you drink too much fluid, your heart has to work much harder to pump the extra fluid around your body. This can make your heart failure symptoms worsen so limiting your fluid intake can help you control these symptoms. The fluid limit for people with heart failure is **8 cups (2000 ml or 2-liters) per day.**

Please see *The Diet and Nutrition Guide for Heart Failure* in Chapter 3 for more detailed fluid information.



Get active

Regular activity can strengthen your heart muscle and increase your body's ability to use oxygen.

Great forms of exercise are:

- Brisk walking
- Jogging
- Swimming
- Bicycling

Your activity program should start slowly in the hospital and gradually increase. Physical activity should be fun and should fit into your lifestyle. Everyone is different. Some people will be able to walk long distances and others will not. Simply do as much as you can, as often as you can.

Please see *Heart Failure: Getting Active and Staying Active* in Chapter 5 of this binder for more detailed information on physical activity, including information on returning to work and sexual activity.

Control diabetes

Diabetes directly affects your heart and blood vessels. Good control of your blood sugar is important to help prevent or delay long-term, serious health problems. If you have any questions about a proper treatment plan, please ask your nurse or dietitian for diabetic diet education materials to help you control your blood sugar. Dietitians can help you choose healthy foods and develop meal plans to help you control your blood sugar.

Monitor your blood pressure

High blood pressure can make your heart work too hard and lose strength. It can also damage your blood vessels, making them stiff, weak or narrow.

If you take a blood pressure medication:

- **Do not** stop taking your medication without speaking to your doctor.
- **Do** follow a low sodium diet and avoid adding salt to your foods.
- **Do** exercise regularly and lose weight if necessary.
- **Ask** your doctor what your blood pressure goal should be.

Get vaccinated

Flu and pneumonia can add extra stress on your heart so they pose a greater danger for people who have heart failure.

Ask your doctor about getting a yearly flu vaccine, a 1 time pneumococcal vaccine and a COVID-19 vaccine.

Get enough sleep

The amount and quality of your sleep is important for a healthy lifestyle. Prioritize sleep and create a healthy sleep routine for yourself to follow.

Having heart failure increases your risk of having a sleep disorder called **sleep apnea**. Sleep apnea causes people to stop breathing during sleep. These repeated interruptions to sleep and drops in blood oxygen level can increase heart rate and blood pressure, making the heart work harder.

If you have these any of these symptoms please tell your doctor:

- History of loud snoring, waking up gasping or choking
- Stop-breathing episodes in sleep reported by a bed partner
- Not waking up refreshed in the morning
- Morning headaches
- Excessive daytime sleepiness

Take Care of your Emotional Health

It is important for you and your caregivers to practice being good to yourselves, both physically and emotionally. We have information, in this chapter, about *Living with Heart Failure: Your Emotional Health* and *How to be an Effective Caregiver for a Person with Heart Failure*.

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