

Heart Failure

# Take Control, Live Better



# Heart failure

**Heart failure means that your heart muscle doesn't pump as much blood as your body needs. It does not mean that your heart has stopped.**

Because your heart can't pump well, your body tries to make up for it. To do this:

- ▶ Your body holds on to salt and water. This increases the amount of blood in your bloodstream.
- ▶ Your heart beats faster.
- ▶ Your heart may get bigger.

Your body has an amazing ability to make up for heart failure. It may do such a good job that you don't know you have the disease. But at some point, your heart and body will no longer be able to keep up. Fluid starts to build up in your body, and you have symptoms like feeling out of breath.

This buildup of fluid is called congestion, so the disease is sometimes called **congestive heart failure**.

Heart failure usually gets worse over time. But treatment can slow the disease and help you feel better and live longer.



## What to expect

At first you may not have any symptoms. But as your heart has more trouble pumping enough blood to your body, you may get short of breath and feel very tired.

Your heart will try to make up for heart failure by pumping faster and by pumping more blood with each beat.

Over time, this can make your heart weaker and make symptoms worse.

## Sudden heart failure

Sometimes your symptoms may get worse very quickly. This is called sudden heart failure. It causes fluid to build up in your lungs. Symptoms may include:

- ▶ Severe shortness of breath.
- ▶ A new irregular or fast heartbeat.
- ▶ Coughing up foamy, pink mucus.

**Sudden heart failure** is an emergency. You need care right away.

## Did you know?

Your doctor may want you to get the flu and pneumonia vaccines. These vaccines can keep you from getting infections that could put you in the hospital.

## Main symptoms of heart failure

### Symptom

### What happens

Shortness of breath

- ▶ You can't catch your breath.
- ▶ You feel tightness in your chest.
- ▶ You feel tired when you walk.
- ▶ You need to stop a lot when you walk.
- ▶ It may get worse when you lie flat, and it may wake you up at night.

Swelling in the feet and ankles

- ▶ It gets worse at the end of the day or after you stand for long periods.
- ▶ It may hurt.
- ▶ Pressure can leave impressions in your skin.
- ▶ Shoes may no longer fit.

Being very tired (fatigue)

- ▶ You have less energy and feel more tired than usual.
- ▶ You can't exert yourself like you could before.

Abnormal heartbeat

- ▶ Your heart races or pounds.
- ▶ Your heart skips beats (palpitations).

Sudden weight gain

- ▶ Fluid builds up and your weight goes up quickly.

# Treatment

**Treatment can slow heart failure and help you feel better and live longer.**

## Go to web

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To get the best results from your medicines, you need to take them the right way. This can be tricky when you have to take more than one. For helpful tips, go to [www.healthwise.net/patiented](http://www.healthwise.net/patiented) and enter **A465** into the search box.

## Medicines

You probably will need to take several medicines to treat heart failure, even if you don't have symptoms yet. Medicines don't cure heart failure. But they can help your heart work better and improve any symptoms that you do have.

Medicines can:

- ▶ Relieve or control symptoms.
- ▶ Improve your daily quality of life.
- ▶ Slow the rate at which your heart failure gets worse.
- ▶ Reduce hospital stays.
- ▶ Help you live as long as possible.
- ▶ Treat other health problems you may have.

It's very important to take your medicines exactly as your doctor says. If you don't, your heart failure may get worse or you may have sudden heart failure.



## Devices

Implanted devices are sometimes used in people who have heart failure.

In cardiac resynchronization therapy, a **biventricular pacemaker** is placed in your chest to make the heart's lower chambers (ventricles) pump at the same time. This type of pacemaker can help you feel better so you can be more active. It also can delay how quickly your heart failure gets worse, help keep you out of the hospital, and help you live longer.

An **implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD)** can prevent sudden death from an abnormal heart rhythm and may help you live longer. An ICD checks the heart for very fast and deadly heart rhythms. If the heart goes into one of these rhythms, the ICD shocks it to stop the deadly rhythm and return the heart to a normal rhythm.

If you get a pacemaker or an ICD, you have to be careful not to get too close to some devices with strong magnetic or electrical fields. Check with your doctor about what precautions you need to take.

## Other treatments

In some cases, you may have other treatments. For example, your doctor may recommend **oxygen therapy** to reduce your shortness of breath and increase your ability to exercise. Or you may have **cardiac rehabilitation (rehab)**. This is often recommended before or after you get a pacemaker or have other heart procedures. Your treatment will depend on what you need.

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If you have a heart rhythm problem, you may be thinking about getting a device.

- ▶ For help deciding about a pacemaker, go to [www.healthwise.net/patiented](http://www.healthwise.net/patiented) and enter **G812** into the search box.
- ▶ For help deciding about an ICD, go to [www.healthwise.net/patiented](http://www.healthwise.net/patiented) and enter **N692** into the search box.



# Taking care of yourself

There are many things you can do to feel better and stay healthy longer. The most important are to:

## Did you know?

Most people with heart failure can still have an active sex life. But sexual problems are common. Talk to your doctor about any problems you may be having. Your doctor can help.

- ▶ **Take your medicines** as prescribed. This gives them the best chance of helping you.
- ▶ **Watch for signs that you're getting worse.** Weighing yourself every day is one of the best ways to do this. Weight gain may be a sign that your body is holding on to fluid.
- ▶ **Find out what your triggers** are and avoid them. Triggers are things that make your heart failure worse, often suddenly.
- ▶ **Limit salt** (sodium). This helps keep fluid from building up and may help you feel better.
- ▶ **Try to get some exercise** throughout the week. Exercise makes your heart stronger and can help you avoid symptoms.

There are other things you can do too—like eating right, not smoking, limiting alcohol, controlling your blood pressure, and staying at a healthy weight. These things are good for your heart. They also reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.



# Tracking your symptoms

**It's important to keep track of your weight and heart failure symptoms and notice if they change.**

Symptom changes may be a sign that heart failure is getting worse. When symptoms get worse quickly, it's called sudden heart failure. This is an emergency.

Tracking symptom changes can tell you when you need to call your doctor or get help right away.

## Check your weight

Get in the habit of weighing yourself every day and writing down your weight. Sudden weight gain may mean that your heart failure is getting worse.

- ▶ Weigh yourself at the same time each day, using the same scale on a hard, flat surface. The best time is in the morning after you go to the bathroom and before you eat or drink anything.
- ▶ Wear the same thing (or nothing) each time you weigh yourself. Don't wear shoes.
- ▶ Keep a calendar by the scale. Write your weight on it each day, and take it when you see your doctor.

## Check your symptoms

Keep notes on how you feel each day. Tracking helps you and your doctor see what symptoms are normal for you and if they change or get worse.

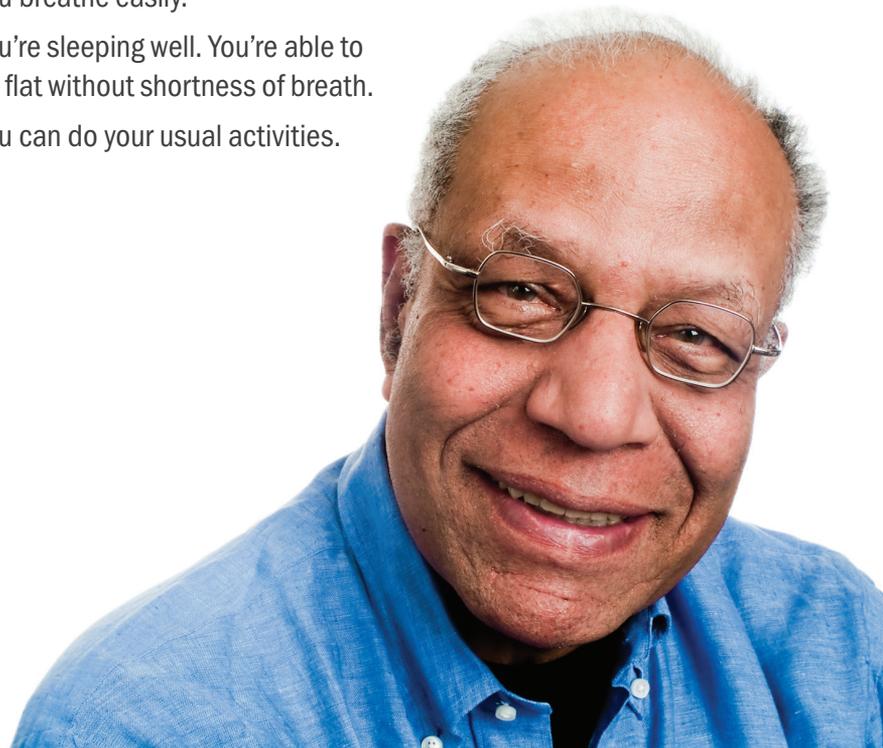
As you think about your symptoms, answer questions like: How am I feeling today? Is it harder than usual to catch my breath? Am I having to prop myself up at night to breathe? Am I more tired than normal? Are my feet and ankles swollen?

You're doing well if:

- ▶ Your weight is stable. It's not going up or down.
- ▶ You breathe easily.
- ▶ You're sleeping well. You're able to lie flat without shortness of breath.
- ▶ You can do your usual activities.

## Did you know?

**Keeping track of your symptoms every day may give your doctor important clues about how you're doing. Take your notes to your doctor visits and talk about your symptoms. Working as a partner with your doctor can help you both manage your heart failure better.**



## Did you know?

Some medicines can make heart failure worse. Always ask your doctor before you take any new medicine, including those you can buy without a prescription.

## Prevent sudden heart failure

There are ways to reduce your chance of sudden heart failure.

- ▶ Keep your diet, exercise, and medicine routine as close to the same schedule as possible.
- ▶ Avoid things that can trigger heart failure. Common triggers are:
  - Eating too much salt.
  - Exercising too hard.
  - Not taking your medicines the right way.
  - Taking medicines that make heart failure worse.

What triggers sudden heart failure in one person may not cause problems for someone else. Talk to your doctor about your possible triggers.

## When to call a doctor

### Call 911 if:

- ▶ You have symptoms of sudden heart failure, such as:
  - Severe trouble breathing.
  - Coughing up pink, foamy mucus.
  - A new irregular or fast heartbeat.

### Call your doctor now if:

- ▶ You have new or increased shortness of breath.
- ▶ You are dizzy or lightheaded, or you feel like you may faint.
- ▶ You have sudden weight gain, such as more than 2 to 3 lb in a day or 5 lb in a week. (Your doctor may suggest a different range of weight gain.)
- ▶ You have increased swelling in your legs, ankles, or feet.
- ▶ You are so tired or weak that you can't do your usual activities.
- ▶ You're not sleeping well. Shortness of breath wakes you up at night. You need extra pillows.

## Heart failure symptom record

Use a form like this to describe how severe your symptoms are, when they start, and whether they get worse. Also note any new symptoms.

### Symptom

### Notes

Shortness of breath

Swelling in your legs or ankles

Sudden weight gain

Feeling tired or weak

Feeling dizzy or lightheaded

Trouble sleeping

Other symptoms

# Healthy eating

**Taking your medicines and following the diet your doctor recommends may make it easier for you to breathe and help you feel better.**

## Go to web

For more ideas on how to reduce salt in your diet, go to [www.healthwise.net/patiented](http://www.healthwise.net/patiented) and enter **B256** into the search box.

To learn how to keep track of your fluid intake, go to [www.healthwise.net/patiented](http://www.healthwise.net/patiented) and enter **S123** into the search box.

## Cut the salt

Salt (sodium) causes your body to retain water and makes your legs swell. Eating less salt can help you feel better and stay out of the hospital.

Your doctor may want you to eat less than 2,000 mg of salt each day. That's less than 1 teaspoon.

Keep track of what you eat and how much salt it has. That way, you'll know when you're close to your limit.

These tips can help you eat less salt.

- ▶ Read food labels. Salt may be “hidden” under different names, such as sodium bicarbonate, disodium phosphate, and monosodium glutamate (MSG). Buy foods labeled “no salt added,” “sodium-free” (less than 5 mg per serving), or “low sodium” (less

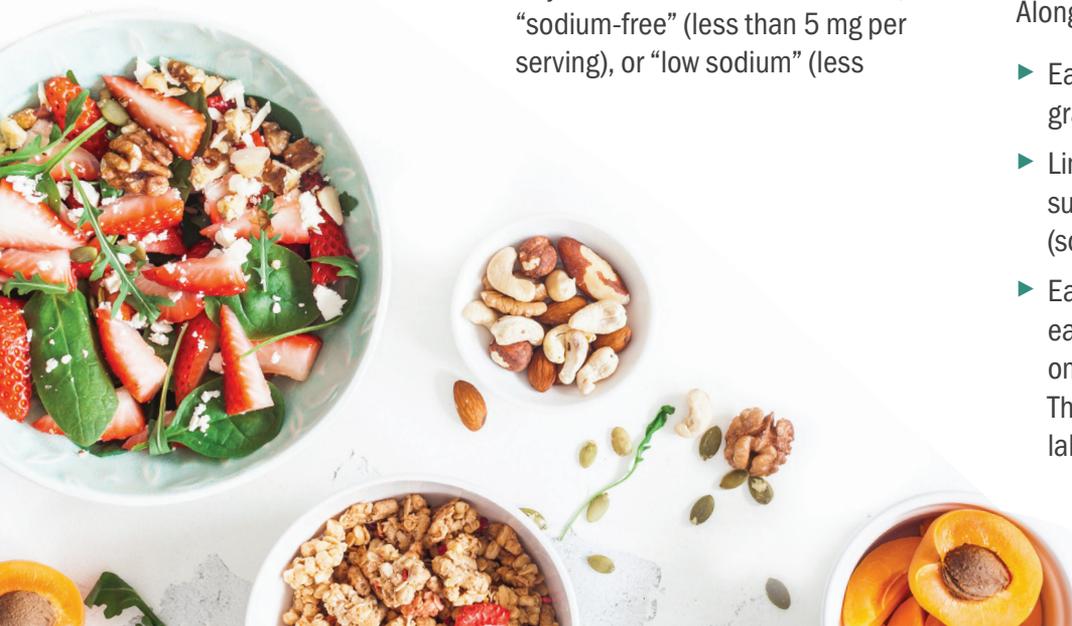
than 140 mg per serving).

- ▶ Eat fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. They have very little salt, and they're good for you.
- ▶ Rinse canned vegetables and beans before use. They're very high in salt unless you buy low-sodium or sodium-free kinds.
- ▶ Flavor your food with things like garlic, lemon juice, onion, vinegar, herbs, and spices instead of salt and high-salt condiments.
- ▶ Eat fewer processed foods. These include anything that's not fresh, such as canned foods, chips, and pizza. Eat out less often, especially at fast-food restaurants.

## Eat a heart-healthy diet

Along with limiting salt:

- ▶ Eat vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and other high-fiber foods.
- ▶ Limit foods and drinks with added sugar, saturated fat, and salt (sodium).
- ▶ Eat at least two servings of fish each week. Oily fish, which contain omega-3 fatty acids, are best. These include salmon, mackerel, lake trout, and herring.



## High-salt foods to avoid

- ▶ Smoked, cured, salted, and canned meat, fish, and poultry
- ▶ Ham, bacon, hot dogs, and lunch meats
- ▶ Regular hard and processed cheese and regular peanut butter
- ▶ Crackers with salted tops
- ▶ Frozen prepared meals
- ▶ Regular canned and dehydrated soups, broths, and bouillon
- ▶ Regular canned vegetables
- ▶ Salted snack foods such as chips and pretzels
- ▶ French fries, pizza, tacos, and other fast foods
- ▶ Pickles, sauerkraut
- ▶ Condiments and seasonings such as soy sauce, ketchup, steak sauce, onion salt, and garlic salt

## Heart-healthy eating tips

### Instead of:

Frying your food

Eating convenience foods (canned soups, TV dinners, frozen pizza)

Using butter, shortening, or oil high in saturated or trans fats

Using salt, soy sauce, or BBQ sauce

Eating all of the meat product

Eating white bread, pasta, and rice

### Try this:

Bake, broil, steam, poach, or grill your food.

Eat fresh fish, skinless chicken, fruits, and vegetables.

Use products low in saturated and trans fats, such as olive oil, vegetable oil, canola oil, or chicken broth.

Use salt-free spices.

Trim fat from meat and skin from chicken.

Eat whole-grain bread, pasta, and rice.

## Limiting fluids

Your doctor may give you “water pills” called diuretics to help get fluid out of your body. Taking this medicine and reducing salt may be enough.

But if you have advanced heart failure, you may also need to limit how much fluid you drink. Your doctor will tell you how much fluid you can have each day. Usually, it ranges from 4 to 8 cups (32 to 64 fl oz), or about 1 to 2 liters. Keep track of your fluids so you don’t get more than your body can handle.

# Getting active

**If you aren't active now, starting to exercise may seem hard. But it's worth it.**

## Go to web

Maybe your doctor said exercise is safe for you, but you're not sure how to get started.

For ideas, go to [www.healthwise.net/patiented](http://www.healthwise.net/patiented) and enter **J903** into the search box.

Being more active:

- ▶ Makes your heart stronger.
- ▶ Makes it easier to breathe.
- ▶ Helps you feel better and have more energy.
- ▶ Helps control your weight and blood pressure.

See your doctor before you start exercising. He or she may want to do a test to see how much activity your heart can handle.

Walking is a great way to get exercise. If your doctor says it's safe, start out with some short walks, and then gradually make the walks a little longer. Swimming, cycling, or water aerobics might be other good choices.

Your doctor can help you make a plan. You can use the form on the next page to record your goals and other details.



## Exercise planning form

**Special tests I need before I begin an exercise program (if any):**

**Exercises to help with my chronic health conditions:**

**Should I change the time I take my medicines?**

**Exercises I should not do:**

**Should I take my pulse when I exercise?** If so, what range (target heart rate) is best for me?

**Warning signs I need to watch for:**

**People who can support me:**

**Physical activities I enjoy or would like to try:**

**In the beginning, my exercise program will be (what, how often, how long):**

**Short-term goals:**

In the next few weeks I will:

1

2

3

**Long-term goals:**

In the next 6 months I will:

1

2

3

**As you reach your short-term goals, add new ones.**



# Coping and support

## Go to web

You can help yourself feel better by changing your “self-talk”—the things you tell yourself. Negative self-talk can make you feel bad. To learn how to think in a healthier way, go to [www.healthwise.net/patiented](http://www.healthwise.net/patiented) and enter **R337** into the search box.

**Heart failure brings big changes to your life. Dealing with your emotions and seeking help when you need it can help you live better with this disease.**

### Cope with your feelings

Heart failure can be hard on your emotions. You may feel sad that you can't do things you used to do. You may worry about your future. And symptoms, such as shortness of breath, can make this anxiety worse.

Talk to your doctor if you have symptoms of depression, like feeling sad and hopeless much of the time, or if you're worried a lot. Depression and anxiety can be treated.

### Find support

Emotional support from friends and family can help you cope with heart failure. You might want to think about joining a heart failure support group. Or you can look for an online support group. Meeting other people with the same problems can help you know you're not alone.

# Joan's story

**Joan figured she'd need months to recover physically from the heart attack that led to her heart failure. She didn't know she would need just as much time to recover emotionally.**

Having heart failure changed how Joan saw herself. "I went from being an active person to barely being able to walk," she says.

Joan worried that any activity would harm her heart. "I could feel my heart pounding when I walked up stairs, even if I went slowly. I was afraid I would drop dead."

Joan also felt down about all the medicines she needed to take.

"I went into a terrible depression," she says. "I would sit at home in this cloud of dread. I felt like I would never be me again. I knew I needed some help."

Her doctor recommended a counselor.

The counselor "helped me see that I was focusing on what I couldn't do instead of what I could do. Maybe I can't exercise as hard as I did before, but I can be active. I may have to take breaks, but I can still walk and swim."

One way the counselor helped was by showing Joan how to stop negative thoughts before they overwhelmed her.

Her doctor also prescribed an antidepressant, which Joan plans to take until she and her doctor feel she is ready to stop.

Joan knows that she'll have some days when she has a lot of energy and other days when she feels tired. "But I'm doing much better. I enjoy my life again."

This story is based on information gathered from many people living with heart failure.



**When you have heart failure, it's important to plan ahead for what to do if your symptoms get worse. Work with your doctor to make a plan.**

## Symptom action plan

Name:

Doctor's name:

.....  
Doctor's phone number:

.....  
Other emergency contact numbers:

.....  
Next doctor visit date:

.....  
Questions for my doctor:

.....  
When should I call my doctor?

.....  
Call 911 if:

.....  
List of my medicines:

.....  
When to take my medicines:

.....  
What do I do if my symptoms get worse?

.....  
What do I need to check or keep track of? (such as blood pressure or weight)

.....  
Do I need to change my diet or activities? If so, what changes do I need to make?

