Congestive Heart Failure
From Heart Failure to Heart Success
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Understanding Heart Failure

What is Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)?

Heart failure does not mean that the heart has stopped, but that the heart cannot pump the blood well. Better control of your blood pressure and diabetes will help your heart pump more easily.

Heart Failure can be caused by:

- Heart attack
- Leaky valves in your heart
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes

What might I feel?

- Short of breath
- Swollen in the belly or legs
- Not as hungry or can not eat as much
- Urge to cough
- Tired
- Dizzy
- Chest pain
How to live well with Heart Failure

When to call for help

Call 9-1-1 for help if you have:
- chest discomfort or pain that lasts more than 15 minutes and does not improve with nitroglycerin or rest.
- severe, continuing shortness of breath
- fainting or passing out
- wake up suddenly struggling to breathe

Call your doctor right away if you:
- have a harder time breathing than normal
- have new shortness of breath while resting
- cannot sleep because you cannot breathe well
- need to sleep sitting up or using more pillows than usual to breathe well
- have fast or funny heart beats that do not stop and/or make you feel dizzy
- cough up foamy white fluid
- feel like you may pass out
- gain more than 3 pounds in one day or 5 pounds in one week
Daily weight monitoring

It is important to monitor your weight

– weight gain is the first sign that your heart failure is getting worse.
– patients can gain up to 10 pounds of “extra” weight from fluid before feeling bad or swelling.

Weigh daily:

– at the same time in the morning, after you urinate (pee).
– while wearing what you sleep in, before eating or drinking.
– using the same scale on a flat, hard surface.

After weighing, write your weight down on the weight log provided in this booklet on page 19 and compare it to your dry weight (your weight on the day you are sent home from the hospital).

If you gain more than 3 pounds in one day or 5 pounds in one week, call your doctor.
Heart Failure Zones

**All Clear – Green Zone**
- NO shortness of breath
- NO weight gain of more than 2 pounds in one day or 5 pounds in one week
- NO swelling in the feet, ankles, legs or abdomen
- NO chest pain
- NO other significant symptoms

**Caution – Yellow Zone (Call your doctor)**
- 3 pound weight gain in one day or 5 pounds in one week
- More shortness of breath than normal
- You need to sleep upright in a chair in order to breathe
- MORE swelling in the feet, ankles, legs or abdomen
- Dry, hacking cough
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Dizziness
- Feeling uneasy—you know something is not right

**Emergency – Red Zone (Seek help now, call 9-1-1)**
- Struggling to breathe
- Unrelieved shortness of breath while sitting still
- Experiencing chest pain
- Feel confused or can’t think clearly
Heart Failure medications

Most people with heart failure will need more than 3 medicines. You may be given any of the following medicines.

**Ace Inhibitors**

*What they do:*
- Lower blood pressure
- Make it easier for the heart to pump

*Possible side effects:*
- Low blood pressure (may make you feel dizzy)
- Dry cough
- Swelling of mouth, lips or tongue (call your doctor immediately)

**Aldosterone Receptor Antagonists**

*What they do:*
- A water pill that helps get rid of salt and fluid while keeping potassium

*Possible side effects:*
- Increased potassium
- Low blood pressure
- Gynecomastia – overgrowth of breast in men

**Anticoagulants**

*What they do:*
- Thin the blood to prevent blood clots

*Possible side effects:*
- Bruising
- Bleeding
**Digoxin®**

**What it does:**
- Helps the heart pump better

**Possible side effects:**
- Slow heart rate
- Yellow-tinted vision
- Not as hungry
- Stomach pain, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea
- Funny feeling heart beats
- Tiredness or weakness

**Hydralazine and Nitrates**

**What they do:**
- Together, they open veins and arteries so the heart does not have to pump as hard.

**Possible side effects:**
- Low blood pressure
- Rash, fever, joint pain, swelling

**Potassium**

**What it does:**
- An electrolyte your body needs to function properly
- You can have too much or too little potassium which can be caused by some medications. Always have your labs drawn as your doctor orders.

**Possible side effects:**
- Muscle weakness
- Funny heart beats

**ARBs**

**What they do:**
- Lower blood pressure and decrease the workload of the heart
- May be prescribed in place of an ACE Inhibitor

**Possible side effects:**
- Low blood pressure (may make you feel dizzy)
- Swelling of the mouth, lips or tongue
  (call your doctor immediately)

**Beta-Blockers**

**What they do:**
- Lower blood pressure and slow down heart rate
- May strengthen the heart’s pumping action over time

**Possible side effects:**
- Low blood pressure (may make you feel dizzy)
- Low heart rate
- Tiredness
- Erectile dysfunction

**Diuretics (Water Pills)**

**What they do:**
- Help get rid of water through urination (peeing), which will help you breathe better and have less swelling

**Possible side effects:**
- Low blood pressure (may make you feel dizzy)
- High blood sugar
- Gout
How to be successful with medications:

– Take all of your medicines as instructed by your doctor or pharmacist
– Do not skip doses unless instructed by your doctor
– Bring all your medicines with you to all appointments in their original prescription bottles
– Tell your doctor about any herbal medicines you are taking
– Make sure you have enough medicine to last until your next refill

Avoid the following over-the-counter medicines:

– Aleve (Naproxen Sodium)
– Advil (Ibuprofen)
– Antacids high in sodium
– Some herbal medicines

Ask your doctor what you can take for pain

Please note: This list of side effects is not all inclusive. Please refer to the package insert and notify your physician if side effects occur. Please be compliant with any labs or testing ordered to monitor drug effects.
How to eat less salt (sodium)

Salt, also called sodium, is found in many foods. Heart Failure patients should not eat a lot of salt. Salt acts like a sponge—soaking up fluid and holding it in your body. This extra fluid can make it harder for you to breathe, or make your feet and belly swell. Too much salt can also make your medicine less effective.

A low-sodium diet contains no more than 2,000 mg of sodium per day. Follow these tips to lower the salt in your diet.

– Take the salt shaker off the table.
– Do not add salt when cooking.
– Use “no salt” herbs and spices like Mrs. Dash.
– Avoid spices and mixes with the word “salt” or “sodium” in the name.
– Never use “salt substitutes” (contain high amounts of potassium instead of salt).

Pick foods naturally low in sodium.

– Choose fresh fruits, vegetables, poultry and fish because they have very little sodium.
– Dried beans, peas, rice and lentils are excellent low-salt/sodium choices as long as you don’t add salt, pork or bacon grease when cooking them.
Learn to read food labels.

- By reading food labels, you can learn which foods are high and low in sodium.
- Avoid frozen dinners, snack foods, canned vegetables and instant hot cereals.

Things you should not eat

- Bacon, sausage and ham
- Fried foods
- Butter, cheese, sauces and salad dressing

Things you can eat

- Grilled chicken and fish
- Grilled, baked or steamed foods
- Oil and vinegar in place of salad dressing

Reading a food label

Always check the serving size and look at the amount of sodium per serving. This example has 30 mg of sodium in a ½ cup and is a good choice. Try to limit the salt to 140 mg or less per serving of food.
Avoid these high sodium foods

- Fast foods
- Frozen foods
- Processed foods
- Cheeses
- Processed or deli meats
- Canned meats
- Canned vegetables
- Frozen dinners
- Snack foods
- Bottled dressings
- Bottled condiments
Choose these low sodium foods

- Fresh fruits
- Fresh vegetables
- Fresh chicken
- Roast
- Fish
- Dried beans
- Yogurt
- Eggs
- Graham crackers
- Oatmeal
- Frozen vegetables
- Fresh herbs
How much can I drink a day?

**Drinking too much fluid will cause:**
- Weight gain
- Shortness of breath
- Swelling
- Medicines will not work as well

**Fluid measurements:**
8 cups = 64 oz = 2,000 ml = 2 liters
- Drinking an extra two cups of fluid will cause you to gain a pound of fluid weight
- Think about a 2 liter soda bottle as your guide to most fluid you should have in one day

**How to measure fluid intake for the day:**

**When measuring liquid:**
- Use a 2 liter bottle
- When drinking fluid or anything that counts as liquid, pour the same amount of water into the bottle
- When the bottle fills up, you cannot have any more fluid for the day

**When measuring ice:**
- Put the same amount of ice that you will eat or drink, put it into your bottle and let it melt

**What is considered a fluid?**
- Anything you drink
- Jello
- Fluid in soups
- Ice

**Tips for a dry mouth**
- Let a piece of sugar-free, hard candy dissolve in your mouth
- Chew gum
- Freeze 15-18 grapes and eat them slowly, letting them melt in your mouth
- Let ice melt in your mouth (remember, you still have to count the fluid in ice)
Quit smoking
Smoking can make Heart Failure worse. If you want to quit, some successful ideas to help you stop smoking are:

S = Set a start date
T = Tell family, friends and co-workers you are going to quit
A = Ahead of time, plan for what will be hard
R = Remove cigarettes/tobacco from your car, home and work
T = Talk to your doctor about getting help to quit

Huntsville Hospital’s Center for Lung Health offers Freedom from Smoking® classes, an eight-week tobacco cessation program of the American Lung Association. Call (256) 265-7071 for information.

Avoid alcohol
Alcohol can be harmful for patients with heart failure, so it is best to discuss your drinking with your doctor. Any alcohol (beer, wine, liquor, moonshine) must be added to your fluids for the day.
Being active

Activity goals
- Be physically active 30 minutes a day for most days of the week.
- Break it into 10 minutes of activity 3 times per day.

Walking goals (start slow!)
How to begin:
- Week 1: Walk 5–10 minutes twice a day
- Week 2: Walk 10–20 minutes twice a day
- Week 3: Walk 20–30 minutes each day
You can begin by walking as little as 5 minutes each day and gradually increase.

Signs you are overdoing it
Slow down or stop if any of these happen while you are active:
- Shortness of breath that prevents you from completing a sentence
- Shortness of breath that doesn’t get better within 5–10 minutes of stopping the activity
- Dizziness or lightheadedness lasting longer than 10–15 minutes
If you have any of these symptoms while being active, slow down. If the symptoms do not get better, stop the activity. Call 9-1-1 if your chest pain or other symptoms are not relieved.

Sexual Activity
- Talk openly with your partner about your sexual needs.
- Pick a time for sex when you feel rested.
- Avoid sex after eating a big meal or drinking alcohol.
- Have sex in a comfortable room that is not too hot or too cold.
- Use foreplay to help your heart get ready for sex.
- Do not support your weight with your arms.
- Have sex in less stressful positions such as lying on the bottom or on your side.

Work
Ask your doctor about a “return to work” date and any restrictions you may have.

Depression
- Seeing a counselor can help you with some of your worries and make you feel better.
- Follow your exercise or activity plan doing things you enjoy.
- Get a good night’s sleep.
- Follow your treatment plan including taking your medicines as instructed.
- Tell your doctor if you have any feelings of anxiousness, hopelessness, sadness or “empty” mood; if you are irritable, restless or lack energy.

National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-8255
Bringing It All Together
6 steps to Heart Failure success

1. Weigh every day.
   – At the same time, first thing in the morning
   – After you go to the bathroom and urinate (pee)
   – Weigh in the clothes you sleep in
   – Write down your weight
   – Compare it to your dry weight
   – Call your doctor if you gain more than 3 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in a week

2. Take your medicines as listed on medicine bottles.
   – Do not skip doses even if you feel well
   – Let your doctor know if you are having side effects to your medicines
   – Check your medicine bottles every week to make sure you do not run out
   – Taking your diabetes and blood pressure medicine as directed will also help you manage your Heart Failure

3. Limit salt and fluids.
   – Read food labels
   – Keep your total salt intake to 1 teaspoon/day (2,000 mg)
   – Don’t add salt to your foods at the table or while cooking
   – Keep total fluids to 2 liters

4. Follow your activity program.
   – Moving will help you have more energy and feel better
   – Start slow and stop exercising if you feel chest pain, become dizzy or so short of breath you can not finish a sentence
   – Speak with your doctor about resuming sexual activity.

5. Know when to get help.
   – Call 9-1-1 if you have chest pain that lasts more than 15 minutes and is not better with nitroglycerin and rest or have severe shortness of breath, fainting or passing out
   – Call your doctor if you are in the “Yellow” or “Red” Zone

6. Keep all your medical appointments.
   – Bring your medications and weight log each time you visit the doctor
   – Follow through with lab draws or other ordered tests
Resources

**American Heart Association**
heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartFailure/Heart-Failure_UCM_002019_SubHomePage.jsp

**CASA**
(256) 533-7775
Specializes in winterizing homes, transportation (age 60+), ramps, grab bars (not age dependent) and donated medical equipment.

**The Cleveland Clinic**
clevelandclinicmeded.com/medicalpubs/
diseasemanagement/cardiology/heart-failure/

**Community Free Clinic**
410 Sivley Road SW
Huntsville, AL 35801
(256) 533-2910

hsvfreeclinic.org
Provides free health care, education and medications to people in Madison County without health care benefits.

**National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute**
hlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/hf

**Senior RX**
100 North Side Square
Huntsville, AL 35801
(256) 532-3345
Offers seniors (age 55+) assistance with medication and transportation.

**TARCOG**
(256) 830-0818
Elder services (extended care)

**Sources for this publication:**
Huntsville Hospital Congestive Heart Failure Clinic
Heart Failure Society of America
UpToDate
# Daily Weight Log

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Goal / Dry Weight: ________________

**Take this with you when you go to the doctor.**
Heart Failure Clinic
Blackwell Medical Tower, Lobby Level, Suite 300
201 Sivley Road
Huntsville, AL 35801
Phone: (256) 265-6566
Fax: (256) 265-6881

Every gift makes a difference! Your tax deductible donation to the Foundation will help provide lifesaving equipment, as well as health and hope to our patients.

To support this program – Please contact us!
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