

LIVING WITH HEART FAILURE

If your doctor has told you that you have heart failure, here are some ways to help improve your condition.

1. **Weigh yourself daily**, at the same time each morning, notify your doctor if you gain more than three pounds in one day or more than five pounds in one week. Keep a record of your daily weights and take it with you to your doctor appointments.
2. **Limiting your salt** intake is very important:
 - a) Salt is not only in your salt shaker, it is also in baking powder, baking soda, MSG, seasoning salt, smoked and processed meats, canned foods, dry soup mixes, prepackaged frozen dinners, snack foods, fast foods and many other foods.
 - b) It is important to read food labels, physicians usually recommend keeping salt intake below 2,400 mg per day (that's equal to one teaspoon of salt).
 - c) When your reading labels look for words like sodium, soda and Na, they all mean salt too.
 - d) Check with your physician for your salt limitation.
 - e) Take the salt shaker off the table.
 - f) Cook without salt.
 - g) Substitute fresh fruits and vegetables for canned or processed.
 - h) Drain and rinse canned foods before preparing to reduce the salt.
 - i) When dining out request that your dish be prepared without salt, most places are very accommodating.
3. Some people with heart failure need to limit their fluid intake, discuss this with your doctor.
4. People with heart failure should **limit their caffeine intake**. Caffeine is a stimulant that actually puts strain on the heart. Decaffeinated coffee, teas and sodas are OK, but fruit juices and water are healthier choices. Remember, chocolate and cocoa contain caffeine too.
5. By **quitting smoking and limiting alcohol** to one serving a day (one glass of beer or wine, or one mixed drink), you'll automatically decrease stress on your heart.
6. Start an exercise program, with the permission of your physician:
 - a) Ask about enrolling in a Cardiac Rehabilitation program.
 - b) Avoid activity right after meals or when it's hot or humid.
 - c) Exercise at the same time and days, so that it becomes a regular part of your lifestyle.
7. Elevate your feet while resting or watching TV.
8. Take a 15 to 20 minutes break each day, breath deeply and think of a peaceful scene. Enroll in a yoga or meditation class with your doctor's permission.
9. Try to reduce stress, count to 10 before responding when you feel angry.
10. Watch for these **warning signs**:
 - a) sudden weight gain
 - b) shortness of breath - not related to exercise or exertion
 - c) swelling of the lower limbs (legs or ankles)
 - d) swelling or pain in the abdomen
 - e) trouble sleeping (waking up short of breath, using more pillows)
 - f) frequent dry, hacking cough
 - g) increased fatigue
11. Ask you doctor about getting flu and pneumonia shots, (those illness will put a great deal of stress on your heart).
12. If you have any questions about your health, write them down, take them with you to your next doctor's appointment and ask your healthcare professional to answer them for you.