

Discharge Information: Heart Failure



You were treated in the hospital for heart failure. Your heart does not pump as well as it should with this condition.

This handout tells you and your caregiver what you need to know about your care in the first weeks at home. Ask your doctor or nurse if there are things you do not understand.

Follow-Up Appointments

Name of Doctor	Date & Time	Phone Number
1.		
2.		
3.		



Eating Plan

Follow the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan to lower blood pressure.

- Limit the amount of salt (sodium) you eat.
- Eat 6 to 8 servings a day of cereal, bread, and grains.
- Eat 4 to 5 servings a day of vegetables and fruits.
- Eat 2 to 3 servings a day of fat free and low fat milk products.
- Eat 4 to 5 servings a week of nuts, seeds, and dry beans.
- Limit lean meat, chicken, and fish to no more than 2 servings a day.
- Limit foods high in fats and oils to no more than 3 servings a day.
- Limit your sweets to less than 5 servings per week.

You may need to limit the amount of fluid you drink. Talk to your doctor about how much is OK.

You may have to keep your salt (sodium) intake to no more than 1500 mg a day.

Check with your doctor about how much salt (sodium) you can have. To cut down:

- Do not add salt to food. Talk to your doctor before using salt substitutes.
- Choose fresh food to eat.
- Avoid high sodium foods.
 - Read food labels to see how much sodium a food has per serving.
 - Do not eat a lot of fast food.
 - Foods high in sodium are canned foods, frozen pizza and frozen dinners, deli meats, and salty snacks.

Some medicines cause you to have too little potassium in your blood. To get more potassium, eat potatoes, yogurt, green leafy vegetables, beans, whole grains, chicken, fish, bananas, and oranges.

Read the “Nutrition Facts” panel on packaged foods to see if that food is a healthy choice. Look at the amounts of total calories, fat, sodium, and other nutrients per serving.

- Many packages have more than 1 serving.
- If you eat more than 1 serving, multiply the nutrition amounts by the number of servings. This will tell you what nutrition amounts you are really eating.



Activity

Increase your activities slowly. Take rest breaks when you work or are active.

You may feel tired for a while. Cut down on your energy needs.

- Sit down while you are bathing or getting dressed.
- Arrange your home so that you can do everyday things with less moving and stretching.
- Take short rests, or get help with hard chores.

Do not drive or return to work until your doctor says it is OK.



Self-Care

Keep all doctor appointments.

Weigh yourself every day on the same scale.

- Find your “dry weight” based on your home scale. Ask your doctor or nurse if you need help with this.
- Weigh yourself at the same time each day. The best time is in the morning before breakfast and after you urinate.
- Weigh yourself without clothes or in just your underwear. Do it the same way each time.
- Write down your weight in a diary to show your doctor.
- Know what a healthy weight range is for you. Ask your doctor what you should do if your weight is not in that range.

Make changes to help keep your blood pressure in control.

- Check your blood pressure every day.
 - Wait 30 minutes after exercise before you take your blood pressure.
 - Take your blood pressure in the same arm each time.
 - Write down your blood pressure reading in a diary to show your doctor.
- Take your medicine.
- Be at a healthy weight.

Check your heart rate every day.

- Sit quietly for 10 minutes before you start.
- Place 2 fingers lightly on the artery on the inside of your wrist. Do not use your thumb.
- Using a clock or watch with a second hand, count the beats you feel for 60 seconds.
- Write down your heart rate in a diary to show your doctor.

You may need to use oxygen at home. The nurse will show you how to set up and care for the equipment.

- Make sure the mask or nosepiece is on properly.
- Clean and replace tubing, mask, bottles, and filters as needed. Wash and dry humidifier bottles. Add new distilled water daily.
- Do not allow smoking or open flames where the oxygen is used. Post No Smoking signs in your home.
- Clean your mouth often.
- Keep the phone numbers of the oxygen supply company close by.
- Know what to do in case of emergency. Have backup equipment ready to use.

Keep your legs up as much as you can to cut down swelling.

If you smoke, you should stop now. Talk to your doctor about ways to help you quit.



Medicine

When you leave the hospital, you should get:

- A list of all the medicines you should take
- Prescriptions for any new medicines

Take your medicine as your doctor asked you to.

- Talk to your doctor before you stop taking a medicine.
- Keep a list of all the medicines you take. Include your prescription medicines, and vitamins, herbs, and medicines you buy at the store.
- Take the medicine list to every doctor or hospital visit.
- Get the follow-up tests that your doctor orders.

Do not take medicines for erectile dysfunction if you take nitroglycerin.

Do not take NSAID pain medicine (such as ibuprofen) unless your doctor tells you it is OK.

These programs help you pay for prescription medicines if you cannot afford them.

- NeedyMeds. Go to: www.needymeds.org
- Partnership for Prescription Assistance. Go to: www.pparx.org or call 1.888.477.2669.



When to Call for Emergency Help

You show signs of heart or blood vessel problems.

- You have sudden chest pain that moves to your jaw, arms, or between your shoulder blades.
- You feel stabbing, squeezing, or tightness in your chest.
- There is a heavy feeling in your chest as if someone is sitting on you.
- Your chest pain does not go away when you rest or take chest pain medicine.
- You feel like you are choking or cannot get air.
- Your lips, nose area, or nails turn blue or gray.
- Your heart feels like it is beating hard, or your heartbeat is not regular.
- You have numbness or tingling in one or both arms.

You have fainting spells.



When to Call Your Regular Doctor

You have any of these problems.

- You gain more weight than your doctor has told you to.
- You gain 3 pounds in 1 or 2 days.
- You have a fever over 100.4.
- You are short of breath.
- You are more tired than usual.
- Your blood pressure is higher or lower than it should be.
- You have pain and swelling in your arms, hands, feet, or legs.

You have signs of dehydration (low body fluids).

- Your urine is darker than normal.
- You urinate very little or not at all.
- You are very thirsty or have a dry sticky mouth.
- You get more tired or feel weaker.
- Your eyes look sunken, and you do not make tears.
- Your heart is beating faster than normal.



Learn More

- American Heart Association. Go to: www.heart.org
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute - National Institutes of Health. Go to: www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- National Institutes of Health. Go to: www.smokefree.gov

This information is general in nature and may not apply to you or your condition. Talk to your doctor or nurse about how to best use this information and how to take care of your medical condition. Be sure to ask your doctor or nurse any questions you might have. This information sheet is not intended to provide or replace professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

Signatures

Patient or Caregiver

Signature

Date

Nurse

Signature

Date

