

# Living with heart failure

A healthy lifestyle is important for all of us to live as full a life as possible and this is the same for anyone living with heart failure. Improving heart failure self-care lowers the risk that you will need hospital stays for heart failure, saves lives and improves quality of life.

You should follow the lifestyle and self-care recommendations suggested by your care team. These recommendations are an important part of your treatment.

**KEEP WATCH ON YOUR SYMPTOMS** and keeping a diary may help, report them to your care team during appointments. You should contact your doctor or go to hospital if your condition worsens.



**KEEPING ACTIVE** boosts energy, improves sleep and quality of life. Your care team can tell you about the type and level of activity that is safe for your particular case. People with heart failure should not start an exercise programme without speaking to their care team.

### **KEEPING TO A HEALTHY WEIGHT AND DIET**

boosts your overall health and limits the strain on your heart. Do not eat a lot of salt, because too much sodium, for example, table salt, can cause fluid to build up in your body. For those with severe heart failure, your care team may suggest to limit your fluid intake.

**LIMITING YOUR ALCOHOL INTAKE** reduces the chance of irregular heartbeats, high blood pressure, stroke, liver problems and some cancers.

## QUIT SMOKING, USING OTHER TOBACCO PRODUCTS AND AVOID DRUGS OF ABUSE such as

methamphetamine, cannabis and



**WEIGH YOURSELF REGULARLY**, even every day. Sudden weight gain may mean fluid is building up in your body. If you gain more than 1-1.5 kg (2-3lb) in 24 hours or 2.25 kg (5 pound) in a week, contact your care team as soon as possible.

VACCINATION AGAINST COVID-19, INFLUENZA AND PNEUMONIA reduces the risk of heart disease. Flu jabs, for example, reduce the risk of major adverse cardiovascular events such as a heart attack (myocardial infarction), stroke and even death.

**DEPRESSION MAKES IT HARDER TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF.** Speak to your care team if you, or your caregiver, feel anxious, depressed or feel that you cannot cope. Mindfulness improves anxiety symptoms and quality of life.

**DON'T BE ISOLATED**. Social isolation seems to increase mortality in people with heart failure. So make the effort and reach out to other people. As heart failure is common, there are likely to be many people nearby who also live with heart failure.

#### TAKE YOUR MEDICINES AS RECOMMENDED.

The most effective drugs will not work unless you take them as prescribed. Unfortunately, it is easy to forget. You should leave the medicine where you can see it, such as on the breakfast table and you could also set an alarm as a reminder, for example, on your phone.



**ATTEND YOUR APPOINTMENTS.** Follow your care team's recommendations and always attend your appointments, whether these are in a clinic, in your home, on the telephone or over the internet. You may also be asked to check and record some measurements, such as your blood pressure, and send these to your care team.

**SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**. People with heart failure can have sex. However, some medicines such as beta blockers or psychological distress and symptoms can reduce your desire or ability to continue or resume sexual relationships. Speak to your care team if you would like more advice.

Women of reproductive age with heart failure should avoid unplanned pregnancy by using effective contraception. Pregnancy with heart failure can be serious. If you are thinking about a pregnancy, speak to your care team.

**PEOPLE WITH HEART FAILURE CAN KEEP WORKING FOR AS LONG AS THEY FEEL ABLE**. Talk to your employer as soon as you feel your heart failure is affecting your ability to do your job. You should find out your employment rights and learn about other sources of support, such as occupational therapy and disability benefits.

#### MANY PEOPLE WITH HEART FAILURE CAN CONTINUE TO

**DRIVE.** However, you need to know the driving regulations both at home or in any country you visit. Your care team will help determine if you are fit to drive and if you need to inform any authorities.



#### PEOPLE WITH HEART FAILURE CAN TRAVEL

ABROAD. But you should discuss your travel plans with your care team. For example, you should know where to get medical help while away from home and make sure you have the right health insurance cover. You should keep medicines in your hand luggage, carry a list of all your medications, and keep the contact details for your device and treatment centres.

KNOW WHO TO CALL. Make sure you and your caregivers know who to contact in your care team if you have questions or worries. Keep these contact details with you at all times. Your local patient group may also be able to help answer questions from you or your caregiver, offer practical advice and guidance.



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