

FROM THE OFFICE OF DR.

What you can do to keep your heart failure under control

If you have heart failure, it is very important to carefully follow the recommendations below. Your doctors and nurses are there to help you, but what you do to help yourself makes a big difference in your condition. Managing heart failure is a team effort, and you are the key player.

What is heart failure?

Heart failure means the heart's pumping power is weaker than normal. It does not mean your heart has stopped working.

With heart failure, blood moves through the heart and body at a slower rate than normal, and pressure in the heart increases. As a result, the heart cannot pump enough oxygen and nutrients to meet the body's needs. The chambers inside the heart respond by stretching to hold more blood to pump through the body. This helps keep the blood moving for a short while. But then the heart muscle walls weaken and are not able to pump as strongly. A number of conditions can cause heart failure, including heart attack and coronary artery disease (a buildup of fat and plaque on the inside of the arteries that supply the heart with blood and oxygen).

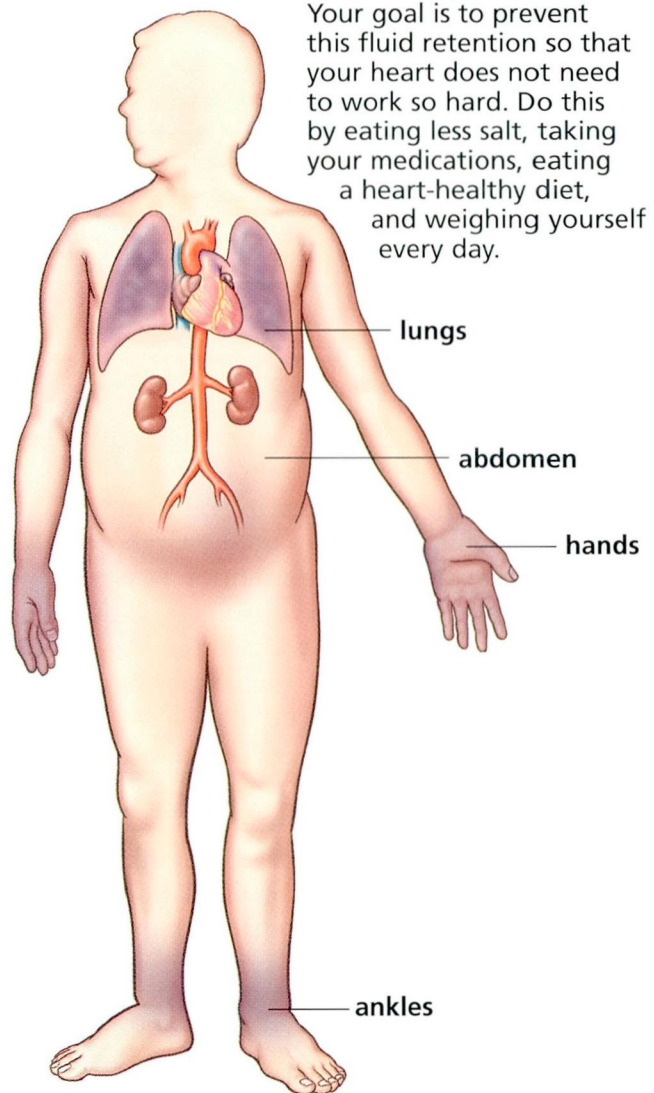
To help your heart pump as well as possible in its weakened condition, you must follow these recommendations, all the time:

Take your medications

Take your medications as directed, every day. If you feel you are having side effects from one of your medications, do not stop taking it—call your doctor!

Heart failure— Areas where fluid can collect

Your goal is to prevent this fluid retention so that your heart does not need to work so hard. Do this by eating less salt, taking your medications, eating a heart-healthy diet, and weighing yourself every day.



CONTINUED



This information is provided by your physician and the *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*. It is not designed to replace a physician's medical assessment and judgment.

This page may be reproduced noncommercially to share with patients. Any other reproduction is subject to *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine* approval. Bulk color reprints available by calling 216-444-2661.

For patient information on hundreds of health topics, see the Patient Education and Health Information web site, www.clevelandclinic.org/health



CONTINUED

Most likely you will need to take more than one medication. Each has a purpose. For example:

- **ACE inhibitors**, such as Capoten (captopril), Vasotec (enalapril) and others, and beta-blockers, such as Coreg (carvedilol), Toprol (metoprolol), and others that were originally developed to control high blood pressure, can also keep heart failure from getting worse for some patients, even those without high blood pressure.
- **Digoxin**, such as Lanoxin, strengthens and slows the heartbeat.
- **Diuretics**, such as Lasix (furosemide) and others, help the kidneys get rid of salt and water.
- **Vasodilators**, such as Imdur (isosorbide) and others, improve circulation by relaxing the blood vessels.

Eat less salt

In heart failure, your kidneys may not get rid of enough salt and water because your heart cannot pump enough blood through them. Eventually, water can start to accumulate in your lungs, hands, abdomen, and ankles, as shown in the drawing. To avoid this, pay attention to the amount of salt (sodium) in the foods and drinks you consume. Most likely, you will need to limit your sodium intake to 2000 mg per day by following a salt-restricted diet.

Drink less fluid if your doctor recommends

Some heart failure patients need to drink less fluid to prevent excess fluid accumulation. If you have met your fluid intake for the day but feel thirsty, you can nibble on frozen grapes or strawberries, suck on ice chips (not cubes), hard candy, or sugarless gum, or cover your lips with petroleum jelly or other lip moisturizers.

Weigh yourself every day

Increasing weight can be an early sign that you are retaining water. Ask your doctor what your “dry” or “ideal” weight is and maintain your weight within 2 or 3 pounds of your ideal weight. Most people can gain 10 or more pounds before

they begin retaining fluid in their ankles, feet, or abdomen. Your heart must work harder to pump this extra fluid throughout the blood vessels in your body.

During each weigh-in, use the same scale and wear similar clothing (for example, don't wear a heavy sweater and pants one day and lightweight pajamas the next day). Also, weigh yourself at the same time each day.

Follow a heart-healthy lifestyle

The following lifestyle changes are especially important if you have heart failure that was caused by a heart attack:

- If you smoke or chew tobacco, stop.
- If you are overweight, limit your total daily calories to lose weight (if recommended by your doctor).
- Limit your intake of foods that contain sugar, saturated fats, and cholesterol.
- Avoid or reduce alcohol intake.
- Increase your physical activity (as recommended by your doctor).
- If you have diabetes or another chronic health problem, do your best to keep it under control.
- Keep all doctor appointments.

Call your doctor promptly when problems occur

Do not wait for symptoms to become so severe that you need to seek emergency treatment. Call your doctor if you have:

- An unexplained weight gain of 2 pounds in one day or 5 pounds in one week
- Swelling in your ankles, feet, legs, or abdomen that has worsened
- Shortness of breath that has worsened
- Extreme fatigue or decreased ability to complete daily activities
- A fast heart rate (more than 120 beats per minute)
- Chest pain or discomfort during activity that is relieved with rest
- Difficulty breathing during regular activities or rest
- Constant dizziness or light-headedness
- A respiratory infection or cough that has worsened.