



Heart Failure: How to Stay Healthy



Heart failure is serious. But you can learn to manage your condition and live well.

Your heart pumps blood that carries oxygen and nutrients to your body and keeps your organs healthy. It can be damaged by heart attack, high blood pressure, alcohol misuse, virus infection, or valve problems. A damaged heart can't pump blood normally. This results in fluid buildup in the legs, belly (abdomen), and eventually the lungs. This condition is called heart failure.

You can use these steps to manage heart failure and live well.

Keep a daily health log

Every day, you need to check and write down notes on your:

- Blood pressure and heart rate (pulse).
- Blood sugar, if you have diabetes. Use the schedule recommended by your doctor.
- Weight. Weigh yourself at the same time every day. It's best to do it first thing in the morning after you urinate (empty your bladder).
- Heart failure symptoms.
- Fluid intake (how much liquid you drink).

You also need to:

- Limit how much salt (sodium) you eat. Your doctor will give you a sodium target (total daily salt).
- Be physically active daily, to help your heart work better.

Be sure to quit smoking (if you smoke). It's one of the best things you can do for your heart and overall health.

Why do I need to weigh myself every day?

Gaining weight suddenly or steadily can be an early warning sign that you're retaining fluid. This can make heart failure worse. Daily weighing can help you know to take action and avoid hospitalization.

My usual (dry) weight is _____.

How much salt (sodium) should I eat?

Doctors recommend that people with heart failure eat 2,000 mg of sodium a day or less. Ask your doctor, care manager, or dietitian to give you a daily sodium target.

My sodium target is _____.

How do I cut down on salt?

- Eat vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and other healthy foods that are low in sodium.
- Avoid processed foods, such as canned and frozen foods or meals, and ketchup or soy sauce. Avoid foods labeled “smoked,” “cured,” or “pickled” that are high in sodium.
- Don't add salt to food. Instead use no-salt seasonings, such as garlic powder, pepper, and other spices and herbs.
- Buy a low-salt cookbook for meals with less salt.
- Choose restaurants with low-sodium options. Or ask your server to prepare your meal without salt.

What do I look for on food/package labels?

Always check the amount of sodium in foods (meals and snacks). Look for foods with 140 mg or less of sodium per serving size or 500 mg or less of sodium per meal.

Also look at the ingredients. If the words “salt,” “sodium,” or “monosodium glutamate (MSG)” is listed, it contains sodium.

Example: This food contains 430 mg of sodium in each 1½-cup serving. If you double the serving to 3 cups, you're getting 860 mg of sodium.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 1/2 cup (208g)
Servings Per Container About 4

Amount Per Serving		
Calories	240	Calories from Fat 72
		% Daily Value*
Total Fat	4g	5%
Saturated Fat	1.5g	8%
Trans Fat	0g	
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	430mg	19%
Total Carbohydrate	46g	17%
Dietary Fiber	7g	25%
Sugars	4g	
Protein	11g	

Also check the package for nutrient claims. Here's a guide to help you understand common claims on the package:

What It Says	What It Means
Salt/Sodium-Free	Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving
Very Low Sodium	35 mg of sodium or less per serving
Low Sodium	140 mg of sodium or less per serving
Reduced Sodium	At least 25% less sodium than the regular product
Light in Sodium or Lightly Salted	At least 50% less sodium than the regular product
No-Salt-Added or Unsalted	No salt added during processing—but may not be salt/sodium-free unless stated

Source: Sodium in Your Diet: Use the Nutrition Facts Label and Reduce Your Intake (www.fda.gov/media/84261/download)

Why is physical activity important for people with heart failure?

It helps your heart work better. Also, you'll have more energy, be less tired, and feel better overall.

Start gradually, especially if you're new to exercise. Walk for 5 to 15 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day. Gradually increase walking or other activity to 30 to 60 minutes a day. Rest when you feel tired.

Do I have to watch how much fluid I get each day?

If you have swelling (fluid buildup) in your legs, hands, and belly (abdomen), your doctor may ask you to limit fluids to prevent this. You can track fluids in what you eat and drink, including coffee, soup, and foods that are liquid at room temperature, such as ice chips, popsicles, and ice cream.

For some people, a daily limit of about 6 cups (48 ounces) is appropriate. Others can have up to 8 cups (64 ounces).

My daily fluid target is _____ ounces/cups.



If my heart failure symptoms get worse than usual, who do I call?

Call 911 or go to the nearest hospital if you have any of these symptoms:

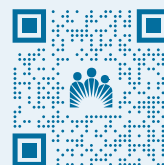
- Severe shortness of breath.
- Coughing up pink, frothy spit.
- Chest discomfort, pain, or pressure that doesn't go away with rest or by taking nitroglycerin (if it's already prescribed for you).

Call your doctor or heart failure care team right away if any of these symptoms get worse or are new for you:

- Sudden gain of 2 or more pounds in one day, or 5 or more pounds in 5 days.
- Shortness of breath (at rest or with activity).
- Increased swelling in your feet, legs, or belly (abdominal area).
- Difficulty breathing when lying down.
- Waking up from sleep panting or breathing rapidly.
- New or worsening dizziness, light-headedness, fainting, or "passing out" (loss of consciousness).
- Cough that doesn't go away.
- Heart rate irregularity that's new or happening more often.
- Problems with any of your medications.

We're here to help

My Doctor Online: kp.org/mydoctor



Heart Failure: kpdoc.org/heartfailure



This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.

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