

Staying well with
heart failure

Introduction

This programme has been written to help you make changes to stay well with heart failure, improve your health and get the most out of life.

Many people think that heart failure sounds final and that it's too late to do anything about it. This is not true. There are lots of things that you, your family/whānau and your health care team can do to help you to feel better and stay well for as long as possible.

Ask your doctor or nurse to help you work through the steps below.

Step 1

Understand my heart failure and symptoms

Step 2

Make my plans to stay well with heart failure

Step 3

Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

You are the most important person in controlling your heart failure. However, it really helps to have support from those around you and to work closely with your doctor, nurse or health professional.

My support team

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Preparing for my health appointments:

- Ask a family member or support person to come with me
- Take this booklet and my daily check records to all my appointments
- Write down any questions I would like to ask

Want to be informed and connected?

- Visit our online Cardiac Community website for information, support and tips for life-long heart health. www.heartfoundation.org.nz/CardiacCommunity
- Join our heart health feedback group and help us to develop resources that meet the needs of you, your family/whānau and your community.
Email: feedbackgroup@heartfoundation.org.nz

Acknowledgements

The Heart Foundation wishes to acknowledge the invaluable support of the Heart Foundation Heart Failure Guideline team in developing '*Staying well with heart failure*'.

Our grateful thanks to the Division of General Internal Medicine, University of North Carolina for granting permission to adapt the illustrations on pages 6–10 and to Independent Health, Buffalo, New York for allowing us to adapt the Heart Failure Action Plan on pages 12–13.

Contents

Step 1: Understand my heart failure and symptoms 02

- What is heart failure? 02
- What causes heart failure? 03
- Can my heart failure be cured? 04
- What is the treatment for heart failure? 04
- Will heart failure shorten my life? 05
- What are the common symptoms of heart failure? 05
- What causes the symptoms of heart failure? 06
- Why doing daily checks is important 07
- My daily checks record sheet 11

Step 2: Make my plans to stay well with heart failure 12

- My heart failure action plan 12
- My 'plan for change' to get the most out of life 14

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans 19

- Why taking my pills is important 19
- Increasing physical activity and exercise 25
- Saving energy for the things I enjoy 27
- Why eating less salt and a healthy diet are important 28
- Stopping smoking 34
- Getting back to work 35
- Starting to drive again 35
- Enjoying sex 36
- Managing stress, anxiety and depression 37
- My angina action plan 40
- Heart attack warning signs 40
- My heart attack action plan 41

Step 1: Understand my heart failure and symptoms

What is heart failure?

Step 1: Understand my heart failure and symptoms

There are a number of questions you may have about heart failure. This section will try to answer some of these. If you have any further questions, fill in the box on page 5 and talk to your doctor or nurse.

What is heart failure?

A healthy heart can pump blood to all parts of the body.

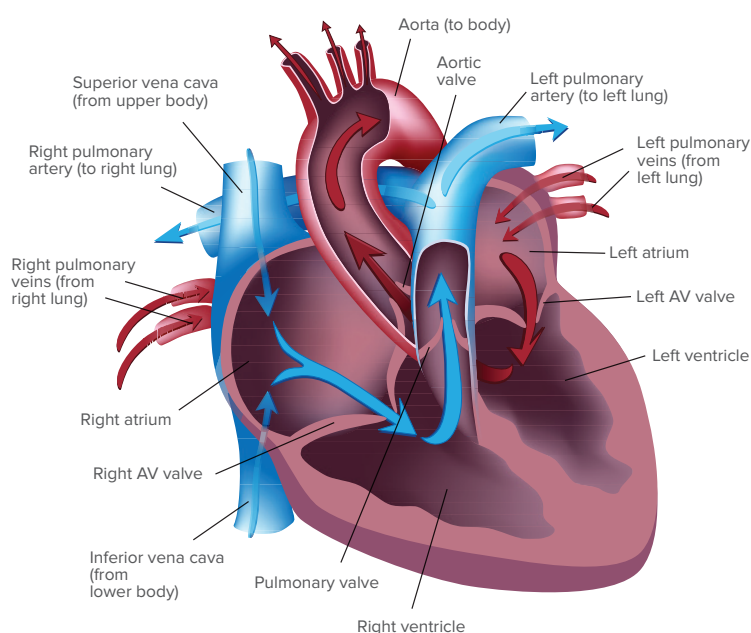
Heart failure means that your heart can not pump blood as well as it should. When your heart doesn't pump well it can make you:

- Feel short of breath
- Have swollen feet, ankles and legs
- Feel tired and weak.

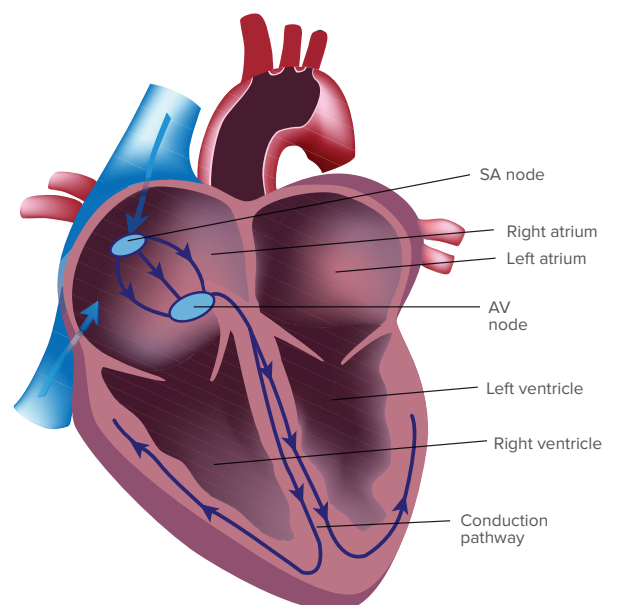
"When the doctor said I had heart failure I thought my heart had just packed up. It was scary! But now I know that's wrong. Heart failure means that my heart's still pumping it's just not pumping as strongly as it used to."

Understand my heart failure

Ask your doctor or nurse to explain the changes in your heart and why it cannot pump blood as well as it should.



Blood flow through heart




Electrical conduction system

What causes heart failure?

Heart failure can affect men and women of any age. It is caused when the heart has been damaged in some way.

Often this damage has been caused by a heart attack or high blood pressure. Sometimes we just don't know what has caused your heart failure.



"I was told that my heart failure was due to high blood pressure. I didn't even know my blood pressure was high - you can't feel it. I've made sure all my family have their blood pressure checked. I don't want the same thing to happen to them."

What caused my heart failure?

Here is a list of things that can cause heart failure. What do you think might have caused your heart failure? Tick (☑) the cause (or causes) that apply to you. If you're not sure, ask your doctor or nurse.

- ☐ heart attack or angina
- ☐ high blood pressure
- ☐ cardiomyopathy (disease of the heart muscle)
- ☐ heart valve problems
- ☐ drinking too much alcohol
- ☐ a virus infection in the heart
- ☐ thyroid disease
- ☐ other causes

My heart failure was caused by:

Step 1: Understand my heart failure and symptoms

Can my heart failure be cured?

Can my heart failure be cured?

Heart failure is a serious condition that can't usually be cured. With no treatment it will get worse – sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly.

The **good news** is that it can be controlled. When symptoms are found early, and with the right treatment and lifestyle changes, you can feel better and lead a more normal life.

"It's never too late to make changes... there are many things you can do to improve your symptoms and feel better."

What is the treatment for heart failure?

Treatment for heart failure mainly involves taking the right pills, eating less salt and keeping active. You will find out more information about these treatments and why they are so important in this booklet.

There are advances being made in the treatment of heart failure nearly every year. In some people with heart failure, the heart's electrical conducting system and rhythm can be affected. Devices such as pacemakers and implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICDs) are now being used to compensate for these disturbances and to help manage heart failure. However, these are not suitable for everyone and require specialist cardiology assessment. Talk to your doctor or nurse about these devices and other treatments that might help you.



Will heart failure shorten my life?

Most people with heart failure are very worried about how long they will live for. It is difficult to say how long you will live. We just don't know. Some people live for many years, even with severe heart failure.

Heart failure may shorten your life, but it all depends on:

- The cause of your heart failure
- How severe your heart failure is
- Whether you have other health problems
- How you respond to treatment
- Whether you continue to take your pills.

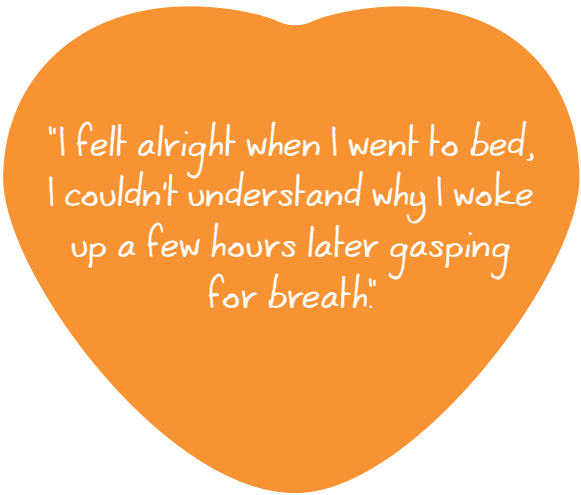
If you are worried about your future, don't keep your worries to yourself.

Ask your doctor or nurse about what to expect.

What are the common symptoms of heart failure?

The most common symptoms of heart failure are:

- Shortness of breath when moving around
- Shortness of breath when you lie flat, especially at night
- Swelling of your feet, ankles and legs
- Swelling or pain in your abdomen (tummy)
- Getting tired very easily
- Unusual weight gain
- Loss of appetite.



"I felt alright when I went to bed, I couldn't understand why I woke up a few hours later gasping for breath."

Other questions I have

Step 1: Understanding my heart failure and symptoms

Can my heart failure be cured

What causes the symptoms of heart failure?

Heart failure starts when another problem makes your heart weak or stiff, so that it doesn't pump or fill normally. This can lead to a number of things happening:

- 1. Fluid build up.** When your heart doesn't pump normally, blood flow becomes slower. This causes fluid to leak out of the blood vessels.

If the **left side** of your heart is not pumping well, fluid can leak into your lungs. See figure A.

Fluid in your lungs can make you:

- Become more short of breath
- Wake up at night short of breath
- Cough or wheeze.

If the **right side** of your heart is not pumping well, fluid can leak into your legs and abdomen (tummy). See figure B.

Fluid in your legs can cause:

- Swelling in your feet, ankles and legs
- Pain in your legs.

Fluid in your abdomen can cause:

- Swelling and tenderness – especially over the right side of your tummy
- Loss of appetite.

- 2. Enlarged heart.** Your heart struggles and has to work harder to pump blood around your body. Over time, this can cause your heart to become enlarged, beat faster and/or irregularly. This can make you feel very tired and you may feel your heart racing.

- 3. Tiredness.** When your heart doesn't pump normally, blood does not flow well around the body. Some parts of your body, including your muscles, don't get the energy and oxygen they need. This can make you feel very weak.

Figure A

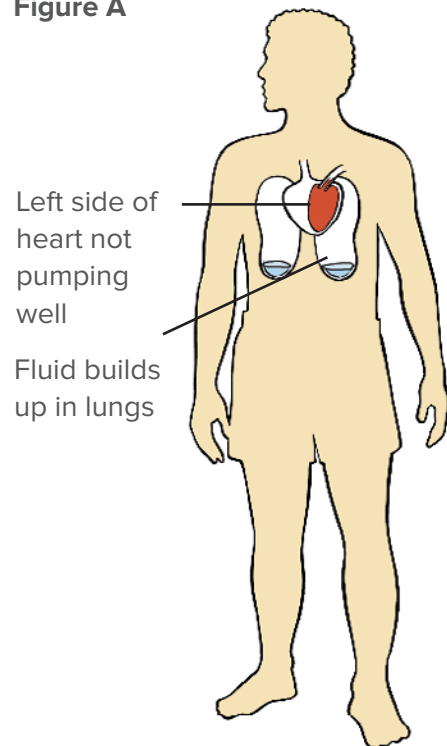
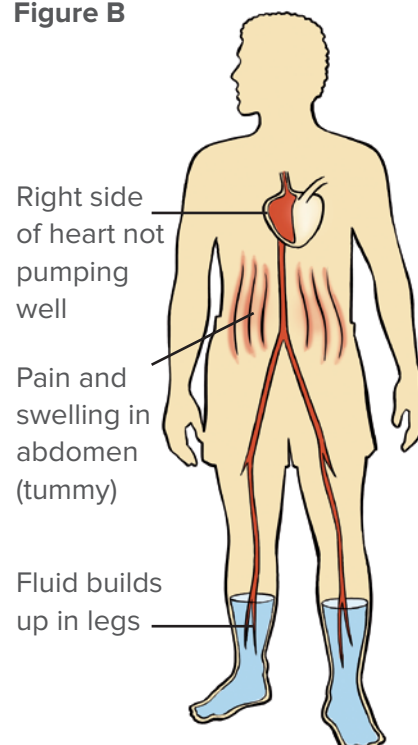


Figure B



Why doing daily checks is important

Heart failure symptoms (swelling, being short of breath and tiredness) mainly happen because fluid builds up in your body. If you learn to recognise this you can:

- Act early to reduce this fluid build up
- Follow your action plan on page 12 –13 to control your symptoms before they get worse.

Track your daily checks using the daily checks record sheet on page 11.

There are three things that you can do to recognise when you have extra fluid in your body:

"My family help me with my daily checks. My wife reminds me to get on the scales before I've had my cup of tea in the morning. The kids check to see if I've written my weight down in my diary."



1. Weigh yourself everyday



2. Check for swelling everyday



3. Be aware of changes in your breathing

Step 1: Understand my heart failure and symptoms

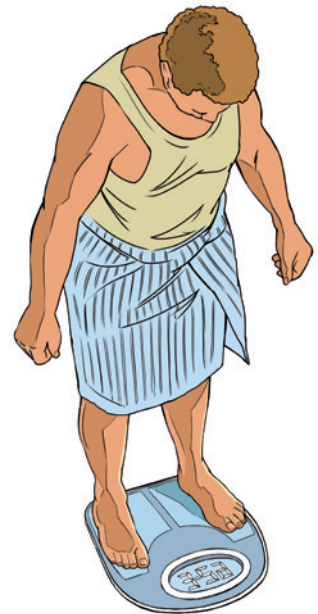
Why doing daily checks is important

1. Weigh myself everyday

The easiest way to know if fluid is building up in your body is to **weigh yourself every day**. If you have extra fluid in your body you'll be heavier. In fact, one litre of fluid weighs one kilogram.

Weigh yourself every morning on the same scales:

1. Write down your weight on your record sheet (page 11) or in a diary or notebook
2. How does your weight compare to your target weight?
3. Are there any changes (increases or decreases)?
4. Do you need to take action? Check your action plan (page 12 –13).



Know your target weight

Your target weight is your weight with no extra fluid. This is the weight at which your body and heart will work the best. Everyone's target weight is different. Your doctor or nurse will help you to work out what your target weight should be.

My target weight is: _____

Tips on weighing yourself

Weigh yourself every morning:

- After you have been to the toilet
- Before you eat or drink anything
- Before you put on your clothes
- Use digital scales
- Use scales on a firm surface for example, lino or tiles
- Keep scales in a visible and convenient place to remind you to weigh yourself.

"I know I'm overweight, so I've always avoided stepping on the scales. But it's not about body fat now. I need to know when I'm gaining fluid. I need to weigh myself everyday. Any sudden increases in my weight is fluid building up and I'm onto it."

2. Check for swelling everyday

Another way to know if your body is holding on to extra fluid is to check for swelling.

Check for swelling each morning:

- Check one leg
- Press firmly into the skin of your ankle, shin and knee with your finger
- If your finger makes a dent in your skin, you have swelling
- Make a note of any swelling on your record sheet (page 11)
- If there is a change follow your action plan (page 12–13).



Other signs of fluid build-up

- Does your waistband feel tighter?
- Do the rings on your fingers feel tighter?
- Do your socks or shoes feel tighter?

"Sometimes my family notice that my symptoms are getting worse before I do. They tell me to check my action plan."

Step 1: Understand my heart failure and symptoms

Why doing daily checks is important

3. Be aware of changes in my breathing

You can tell how well your heart is doing by how you feel. Make a note of changes in your breathing on your record sheet (page 11).

Follow your action plan on page 12–13 if you:

- Are more short of breath than usual
- Have a constant cough or wheeze
- Notice a change in your sputum colour
- Have difficulty carrying on a conversation
- Need to use more pillows at night.



"I was becoming really short of breath at night. When things were bad I used to sleep in the chair. I told my doctor and he changed my pills. Now I can sleep in bed with a couple of pillows."

Do you need to use more pillows at night?

Feeling short of breath when lying flat is a common symptom of heart failure. When your symptoms are well controlled you may be able to sleep comfortably with just one or two pillows.

When your symptoms are bad, you may find that you have to sleep upright or in a chair to avoid being short of breath. If you need to use more pillows than usual at night to help you breathe, it might be a sign that your symptoms are getting worse and you should follow your action plan.



1. One to two pillows
– able to lie flat with no shortness of breath.

2. Need to add more than two pillows to avoid shortness of breath.
Take action. Follow your action plan.

3. Unable to lie down flat
– have to sleep upright to avoid shortness of breath.
Take action. Follow your action plan.

My daily checks record sheet

Use this record sheet to track your daily checks.

Day	Date	Weight	Any swelling?	Any change in breathing?	Notes
Mon					
Tue					
Wed					
Thu					
Fri					
Sat					
Sun					

Day	Date	Weight	Any swelling?	Any change in breathing?	Notes
Mon					
Tue					
Wed					
Thu					
Fri					
Sat					
Sun					

If you would like more copies of this record sheet visit: www.heartfoundation.org.nz and search for 'my daily checks record sheet'.

Step 2: Make my plans to stay well with heart failure

My heart failure action plan (Understand what to do when my symptoms get worse)

If you can recognise changes in your heart failure symptoms quickly, you can take action to feel better and stay out of hospital.

Your doctor or nurse specialist will make your action plan with you and your family/whānau. They will fill in the underlined areas to ensure that your plan is specific to you. Remember to ask your doctor or nurse about changes to your action plan at each visit.

Name: _____

Doctor/Nurse: _____

Doctor/Nurse telephone number: _____

Date: _____

Target weight (my weight with no extra fluid): _____

To stay well with heart failure it is important that I:

- Do my daily checks (page 7 –10)
- Record my daily checks (page 11)
- Take my pills everyday (page 19)
- Eat less salt (page 28)
- Drink about the same amount of fluid everyday (page 31)
- Limit or avoid alcohol (page 32)
- _____
- _____

Step 2: Make my plans to stay well with heart failure

My 'plan for change' to get the most out of life

<p>I FEEL WELL</p>	<p>My symptoms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weight is on target • Little or no swelling • Breathing is easy. 	<p>What to do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep taking my pills • Keep eating less salt as part of a healthy, balanced diet • Keep doing my daily checks – weight, swelling and breathing • Keep making changes to improve my health.
<p>I DO NOT FEEL WELL</p>	<p>My symptoms:</p> <p>Weight is up by ____ kgs over 1–2 days</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swelling in ankles, legs or tummy • Hard to breathe with activity or at night • Need to use more pillows at night • Constant cough or wheeze • Very tired. <p>Weight is down by ____ kgs over 1–2 days</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry mouth/skin • Dizziness. 	<p>What to do:</p> <p>If my weight has increased:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>If my weight has decreased:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Call my doctor or nurse:</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>I NEED TO GET HELP NOW</p>	<p>My symptoms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden, severe shortness of breath • Angina not relieved after following angina action plan • Develop new chest pain/tightness/heaviness • Sweating, weakness or fainting. 	<p>What to do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get help NOW • Call 111 for emergency help.

Step 2: Make my plans to stay well with heart failure

My 'plan for change' to get the most out of life

My 'plan for change' to get the most out of life

It's never too late to make lifestyle changes to help you stay well with heart failure, improve your general health and get the most out of life.

We know that there will be many things going on in your day-to-day life which may make it hard to make lifestyle changes. You may be feeling tired, unwell or unsure about where to start and how to make changes.

Remember, you don't have to make big changes, taking small steps is a great start and can help you feel better.

If you feel ready to take steps towards making a lifestyle change, ask your family/whānau, nurse or doctor to help you make your 'plan for change' over the page.

MYTH

I've tried making changes before but I have no will power. I find it difficult.



TRUTH

We are all capable of making changes. Very little will power is needed if you:

- Just change one thing at a time
- Choose something **you** really want to do – make this your goal
- Decide on the small steps you will take each week to achieve your goal – make these your targets
- Monitor your progress each day
- As your targets become part of your daily life, add new targets and goals
- Get the support you need to make change.

Improve your health and wellbeing step by step. Remember some days may be better than others.

My 'plan for change' – choosing my goal

1. What do you want to change first? What is your goal?

- To help you decide, look at the wheel below
- The sections of the wheel show different areas of life and lifestyle which affect your heart failure and general health
- There is also space to add in other areas of life which may be important to you
- Circle the areas in your life that you would like to do better in
- Circling these will help you identify where to focus your energy and take control by making your 'plan for change'.



Step 2: Make my plans to stay well with heart failure

My 'plan for change' to get the most out of life

'My plan for change' – Choosing my goal

What is the overall thing that you want to achieve? This is your goal.

Example: *To stop adding salt to my food*

On a scale of 1–10, how important is it for you to tackle this goal?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not important							Very important		

If it is less than 7 then think about starting with something else.

Getting started – choosing my targets

Break down on your goal into small, achievable steps. We'll call these your 'targets'.
Set targets that are simple and realistic.

What are your targets?	Make it detailed...	Set a time...
Remember to keep these achievable.	How much? How long for? How many?	What days? What time?
Example: <i>Stop adding salt to my food</i>	<i>Stop adding salt to my meals and snacks at the table</i>	<i>For all meals and snacks 7 days a week</i>

Step 2: Make my plans to stay well with heart failure

My 'plan for change' monitoring process

On a scale of 1–10, how much effort will it take for you to achieve these targets?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Too easy					Too hard				

Decide on targets that score about 5 for effort. If it is more than a 7 then think about starting with something easier. You want to set small, achievable targets.

Discuss your plan with your support team so they know how they can support you.

Think about all the things that are going on in your daily life. What might get in the way of you achieving your targets?

Example: *I like adding salt to my vegetables*

How will you overcome these?

Example: *Try flavouring vegetables with herbs and spices instead of salt.*

It's easier if you are on the journey together. Get your family/whānau and friends to plan and make changes with you. They will feel the benefits too.

'Plan for change' – monitoring progress

Carefully monitoring progress against your targets each day has been shown to be a very important factor in helping people succeed at making change.

Use the daily progress sheet on the next page to score how easy or hard you are finding it to achieve your targets.

My daily progress sheet

Every day, score the effort it takes to achieve your targets.

12345678910

Too easy

Too hard

My plan for this week

My daily effort scores

Goal	Target	When	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Example: Stop adding salt to my food	Stop adding salt to my meals and snacks at the table	For all meals and snacks, seven days a week	6	7	7	7	7	7	7
	Having porridge oats (without salt added) instead of cornflakes	For breakfast Monday to Friday	3	3	3	3	3	-	-

How did it go? Review your daily progress sheet. If you are finding it hard to achieve your targets (for example, you scored more than 5 on most days), spend more time on this target. If you are finding it easy to achieve your targets (for example you scored less than 5 on most days) increase your target by:

- doing it for longer
- doing it more often

Are you ready to try something new next week? Add a new goal or target.
Do you have all the support you need to succeed?

If you would like more copies of this progress sheet, visit www.heartfoundation.org.nz and search for 'my daily progress sheet'.

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why taking my pills is important

People with heart failure often need to take a variety of pills and this can be challenging.

Medications may be prescribed to people who have heart failure:

- To make them feel better
- To improve the heart's function
- To keep them out of hospital
- To save lives.

Useful questions to ask your doctor about your heart failure pills

- What pills have you given me?
- Why is it important that I take these?
- What do I need to know about taking these pills?
- What checks are needed when I take these pills?

Heart failure pills are not just a one-off prescription. **It is important that you keep taking these for the long term.** You may be worried about the thought of having to take heart failure pills for the rest of your life.

Speak to your doctor or nurse if you have any concerns about taking your pills. They can help you work through the benefits and risks.

Managing my pills

1. Take each of your pills, every day, at the right times.
Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you want to make changes to the times you take your pills
2. Do not skip doses of your pills, even when you feel well
3. Do not stop taking pills without advice from your doctor or nurse - stopping suddenly can be dangerous
4. Plan ahead so that you do not run out of your pills. Get a new prescription a week before you need it. If you are going away on holiday / overseas, make sure you have plenty of pills
5. Never take more than your prescribed dose. If you can't remember whether you have taken your pills, wait until the next time they are due
6. Carry a list of your pills with you at all times.

"When I found out that I'd be on pills for the rest of my life, it was hard. But I know that being on the right pills makes me feel so much better. So now I don't have any worries about taking them."

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why taking my pills is important

Taking medications for the rest of my life

Pills commonly used in heart failure

- Your treatment for heart failure may include some or most of these pills
- No medications can be used in all patients. There may be unwanted effects
- If you are worried that you are not on a pill, talk to your doctor or nurse specialist
- **It is very important that you talk to your doctor if you wish to become pregnant. Some pills should not be taken during pregnancy as they may harm your baby.**

Type of pill	About the pill I am on	What it does	What I need to know about taking this pill
Diuretic (water pills) <i>Furosemide</i> <i>Bumetanide</i>	Name:	Diuretics help the body get rid of excess fluid that can accumulate in heart failure. Excess fluid can cause difficulty breathing and leg swelling. Diuretics help relieve these symptoms and make people feel better.	Dehydration can occur if too much fluid is removed from the body. Ensure you have developed an Action Plan with your doctor so you can maintain your target weight. Diuretics may reduce the potassium and other electrolyte levels in your body. Your doctor may monitor this with blood tests. Unwanted effects may include: Dizziness (especially sitting to standing), skin rash, gout, thirst.
ACE Inhibitor <i>Cilazapril</i> <i>Enalapril</i> <i>Quinapril</i> <i>Lisinopril</i> <i>Captopril</i> <i>Perindopril</i> <i>Trandolapril</i>	Name:	ACE inhibitors prevent worsening of heart function, improve symptoms, reduce the chance of being admitted to hospital due to heart failure, and improve survival (save lives).	Your doctor will start you at a low dose, and gradually increase to the highest amount that you can tolerate up until a maximum target dose. Your doctor will monitor your kidney function and potassium levels. Unwanted effects may include: You may feel dizzy after the first few doses, but starting at a low dose should help reduce this. The dizziness will go away after a few days. If not, contact your doctor. If you notice a dry tickly cough shortly after starting this medication, talk to your doctor as they may switch you to a different medication. Tell your doctor immediately if you have difficulty breathing, develop a rash, weakness, confusion, sudden nervousness or swelling.

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why taking my pills is important

Type of pill	About the pill I am on	What it does	What I need to know about taking this pill
ARB (Angiotensin receptor blockers) <i>Candesartan</i> <i>Losartan</i>	Name:	These are used as an alternative to ACE inhibitors when unwanted effects occur.	As with ACE inhibitors.
Beta-blocker <i>Bisoprolol</i> <i>Carvedilol</i> <i>Metoprolol succinate CR</i>	Name:	Beta-blockers improve heart function, reduce the likelihood of being admitted to hospital due to heart failure and improve survival (save lives).	Your doctor will start you at a low dose and gradually increase to the highest amount you can tolerate up to a maximum target dose. It is important that you do not suddenly stop taking this medication without consulting your doctor, and it is likely that they will reduce the dose slowly before stopping. Unwanted effects may include: You may notice tiredness and dizziness when you start taking these tablets, but these generally settle within a week or two. If not, or you experience breathlessness, contact your doctor. You might notice cold hands and feet, or have vivid dreams.
Aldosterone Antagonist <i>Spironolactone</i>	Name:	Aldosterone antagonists have a weak diuretic effect. In patients with heart failure due to weak heart muscle, they help reduce symptoms and improve survival (save lives).	Your doctor will monitor your kidney function and potassium levels while you take this medication. This is very important. Unwanted effects may include: Some men may notice breast tenderness and/or enlargement.
Digoxin	Name:	Digoxin is used to control (slow) irregular heart rates. It also helps the heart to beat more strongly. It is used for symptom control so can help to make people feel better, but it does not save lives.	Your doctor may request blood tests to monitor the level of digoxin in your blood. This is to make sure the dose is high enough to be effective, but not too high that it is toxic or you experience adverse effects. Your potassium level and renal function will also be monitored. The best time to take these tablets is with your evening meal. If you take calcium, iron or antacids, you will need to take these at least 2 hours apart from your digoxin. Unwanted effects may include: Nausea, yellow vision, or your heart rate feeling too slow. If you do experience any of these, contact your doctor immediately.
	Name:		
	Name:		

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why taking my pills is important

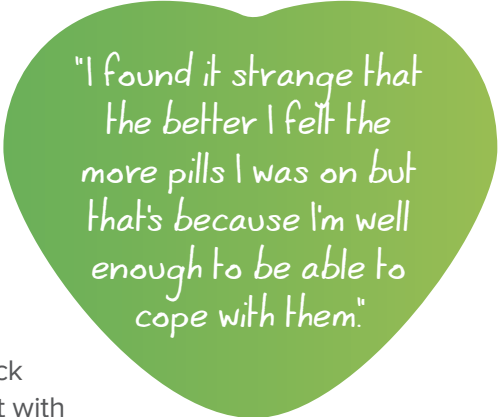
Why do my pills get changed?

Some of the most effective pills need to be started at small doses and gradually be increased to the 'target' doses that have been shown to have these good effects.

This may mean that you need to see your doctor or nurse every few weeks at first until the right dose and combination for you is achieved.

Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist can help you to keep track of these early medication changes. It is good to keep a list with all your current doses, and always bring all your pills when you are being seen by one of your health care team. The chart on pages 20–21 will give you some simple information on some of the most important heart failure pills.

Ask for written directions if you are unsure when your pills are changed. A medication may come in different dose strengths. It can be confusing to have more than one dose strength at home. Talk to your pharmacist if you have any doubts.



"I found it strange that the better I felt the more pills I was on but that's because I'm well enough to be able to cope with them."

If you are not sure why you are taking a particular pill, or are concerned that you may be having an unwanted effect, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Some pills can be harmful

The common NSAID (anti-inflammatory) pain relievers which include ibuprofen, indomethacin, naproxen and diclofenac, can make heart failure worse. Ask about other types of pain killer that may be better for you.

If you have gout, talk to your doctor about pills to prevent gout, so that you can avoid NSAIDs. Avoid natural remedies such as:

- Ephedra (ma huang)
- Ephedrine metabolites
- Chinese herbs
- Hawthorne (crataegus) products

because they may interfere with your heart failure pills.

Ask your doctor or nurse about getting a flu jab.

Don't hesitate to ask

Talk to your pharmacist, doctor or nurse if:

- You think you are having unwanted effects from your pills
- You are having trouble remembering when to take pills. A blister pack may help
- Before you take over the counter pills, traditional medicines or natural remedies. Some of these may interfere with your pills or even make your heart failure worse
- Before you start any newly prescribed pills.

If you have a tummy upset with diarrhoea or vomiting contact your doctor or nurse. You may need to have your pills changed to stop you getting dehydrated.

What do you think about your heart failure pills?

Many people with heart failure find it hard to take their pills correctly. There are lots of reasons for this. Here is what some people think about their heart failure pills. Have a look at the statements below. Which ones do you agree with? When you've finished, take a look at the answers over the page.

Statement	Agree ✓	Disagree ✓
If I'm on more pills it must mean I am really ill.		
I don't like taking my pills all the time – I just take some when I am feeling bad.		
It can be dangerous to suddenly stop taking your pills.		
I get some herbal pills from the supermarket. I don't need to tell my doctor because you don't need a prescription for them.		
It doesn't make much difference if you forget to take your pills the odd time.		
If you can't remember if you took your pills, the safest thing is to take them again.		
If the unwanted effects are bad it's better not to take them.		

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why taking my pills is important

Answers

If I'm on more pills it must mean I am really ill.	Not true. The more pills you are on, the more treatments there are that can help you.
I don't like taking my pills all the time – I just take some when I am feeling bad.	Not true. Your pills won't help unless you take them regularly – each day. No matter how well you feel, don't stop taking them without talking to your doctor or nurse.
It can be dangerous to suddenly stop taking your pills.	True. Stopping taking your pills without medical advice can be dangerous.
I get some herbal pills from the supermarket. I don't need to tell my doctor because you don't need a prescription for them.	Not true. Herbal pills, traditional medicines, cough remedies and vitamin supplements can cause problems. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist first.
It doesn't make much difference if you forget to take your pills the odd time.	True. It doesn't make much difference if you forget the odd time as long as you get back on them. Take your next dose when it is due.
If you can't remember if you took your pills, the safest thing is to take them again.	Not true. Wait until they are due again. It is safer to take too few rather than too many.
If the unwanted effects are bad it's better not to take them.	Not true. Report all unwanted effects to your doctor. They can often be overcome.

If you have questions or concerns about any of your pills (for example, about unwanted effects or the cost of your pills), talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about them.

For more information about your heart failure pills, talk to your doctor or nurse, or visit the Medsafe website www.medsafe.govt.nz

Increasing physical activity and exercise

Physical activity or exercise is one of the best ways to stay well with heart failure. In the past, people with heart failure were told to rest and take things easy. Now we know that physical activity and exercise is healthy and safe for most people with heart failure.


How can I ease into exercise?

Are you new to exercise and not sure how to get started? Do you want to get back to doing something you've had to give up?

The key is to start gently with small amounts of regular exercise and build up gradually. To get started ask your doctor or nurse to help you make your 'plan for change' on page 14.

There are lots of household tasks that count as physical activity:

- doing the vacuuming
- washing the car
- walking to the letterbox and back



"I thought exercise would make me more breathless. I spoke to my nurse - she helped me make a plan to get started. She told me that it's normal to be a bit breathless when you exercise - especially when you first start."

Small steps to increasing your exercise

- Start with an activity that you can do now. It could be a 10 minute walk a day (five minutes there and five minutes back)
- On day one, do what you have planned. Don't do more, even if you feel up to it. Stop to rest if you need to
- Do the same amount of exercise the next day. If you are too tired, do less for the next few days. If you feel okay, do the same walk each day for a week
- Plan to increase the amount of exercise each week. Do your activity for a little longer or go a little further
- **Build up to 30 minutes a day on most days of the week**
- Talk to your doctor or nurse about suitable exercise programmes in your hospital or community.

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Increasing physical activity and exercise

What level of exercise is right for me?

Take the talk test – if you can't talk in sentences while you are exercising, you are working too hard and should slow down. If you can whistle or sing, you may be going too slow and should speed up.

MYTH

When you exercise – if there's no pain there's no gain.



TRUTH

Exercise should make you feel good, not cause you pain or make you feel unwell. Listen to your body – start off slowly and build up your activity gradually. Exercise at a pace that allows you to breathe comfortably and carry on a conversation.

Why is it important not to overdo it?

Your body needs time to get used to being more active. If you build up your exercise slowly you will notice that it will get easier and you will be able to do more. However, if you overdo it when you are feeling well, you may find that you need to rest for a couple of days afterwards. This means that you will lose fitness and the next time you exercise, you won't be able to do as much.

Tips for how to avoid over-doing your exercise

- Stick to your goals
- Even if you're feeling fresh do only what you planned
- When you've reached your goal, choose a new one.

"The family feel more relaxed when I take my mobile with me when I go for a walk."

Don't exercise if you:


- Have just eaten a meal – wait for 1–2 hours
- Are more short of breath at rest or have more symptoms than usual
- Feel exhausted
- Have a fever, infection, or feel ill
- Have chest discomfort or angina
- Have had a big change in your pills in the past week.

Saving energy for the things I enjoy doing

You can have more energy for the things that you enjoy doing by making small changes to your daily routine. Use the 'plan for change' on page 14 to help you make changes to your daily routine.

Here are a few energy saving tips:

- Don't wait until you are worn out to rest
- Plan rest times during the day – e.g. rest for an hour after lunch
- Rest between jobs
- Don't rush too much
- Sit to do jobs such as preparing food or ironing
- Push heavy objects instead of pulling them
- Do less when it is very hot or very cold
- If you don't sleep well, talk to your doctor or nurse about what might help you to sleep.



"I used to feel exhausted after my shower. Now I put on a toweling dressing gown to dry myself and sit down to get dressed. Then I can enjoy breakfast."

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why eating less salt and a healthy diet are important

Why eating less salt is important

Reducing your salt intake is a **very important** step in managing your heart failure. Salt, or sodium, makes it harder for your body to get rid of fluid. Eating too much salt is likely to make your heart failure symptoms worse.

A healthy, balanced, low salt diet will help to:

- Improve your heart failure symptoms
- Give you more energy
- Keep you at a healthy weight
- Manage gout, high blood pressure and diabetes.

"I couldn't believe the difference that cutting down salt made to me. I was able to cut down on my water pills."

How can I eat less salt?

Making small changes in your eating can make a big difference to your salt intake. Most of the salt we eat is hidden in foods like bread, cereals, spreads, processed meats and tinned foods.

Choosing foods at the supermarket

- Choose foods that are low in salt
- Most of the salt we eat is hidden in processed foods. Checking the nutrition information on food labels is an easy way to choose foods lower in salt.

If choosing processed foods, look for 'no added salt', 'reduced salt/sodium', 'low salt/sodium' or 'unsalted'.

Salt is measured as sodium on food labels.

The main ingredients come at the start of the ingredients list. Avoid foods where salt or sodium chloride is listed near the start of the ingredients.

Nutrition information

Serving size: 45g

Servings per package: 10

	Per serve	Per 100g
Energy (kJ)	659	1465
(Cal)	158	350
Protein (g)	4.8	10.6
Fat-Total (g)	1.3	2.9
- Saturated Fat (g)	0.3	0.6
Carbohydrate -Total (g)	28.0	62.3
Sugars (g)	11.2	24.8
Dietary Fibre (g)	7.5	16.6
Sodium (mg)	135	300

Ingredients: Cereals (68%) [wholegrain Cereals (52%) (wheat, whole wheat flour, barley malt flour), wheat bran (16%)], sultanas (20%), sugar, barley malt extract, maize, starch, salt, vitamin E.

Compare foods and choose the brand with the lowest sodium per 100g.

Look for the words salt, sodium chloride or brine on the ingredients list.


Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why eating less salt and a healthy diet are important

When you eat at home

Cut down on commercially prepared, highly processed or instant foods.

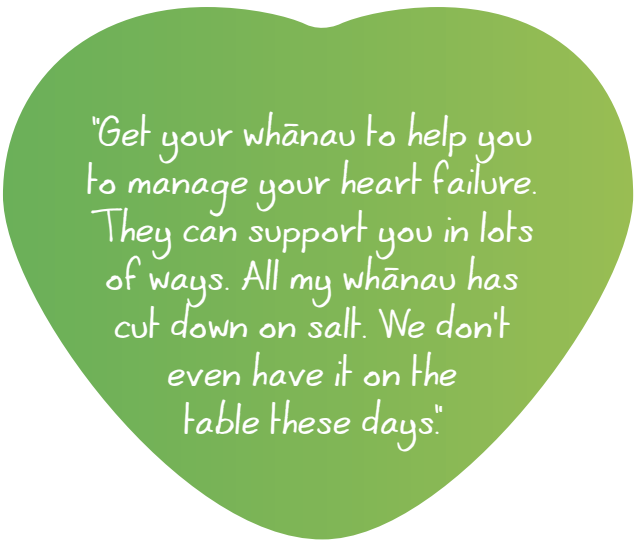
- Eat plain, fresh or frozen fruit, vegetables, fish, meat and chicken
- Try not to add salt when you are cooking, or at the table
- Try not to use stock cubes, powders or instant soups
- To add flavour to your meals use herbs, spices, garlic, onion, chilli, lemon, vinegars, tomatoes, unsalted nuts and seeds
- Salt substitutes are often **too high** in potassium so it is best not to use them
- If choosing processed foods, look for 'no added salt', 'reduced salt/sodium', 'low salt/sodium' or 'unsalted'.



"It took my taste buds a few weeks to get used to less salt but using herbs and spices made my food taste better."

When you eat out or take away

- Ask for food cooked with no salt and no MSG (monosodium glutamate)
- If you are unsure how much salt is in a particular food, try something different
- Order food that is fresh, broiled, baked or grilled
- Ask for dressing and sauces to be put on the side- you can then use a little of them or not at all.



"Get your whānau to help you to manage your heart failure. They can support you in lots of ways. All my whānau has cut down on salt. We don't even have it on the table these days."

Small steps to eating less salt

- Find out how to read labels to show salt levels in foods (see page 28)
- Take salt off the table
- Change one food at a time such as having porridge or muesli instead of cornflakes
- Gradually swap all salty foods for foods low in salt
- Over a few months you will get used to less salt. You will know when your tastebuds are used to less salt as foods high in salt will now taste too salty.

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why eating less salt and a healthy diet are important

Eating well

Eat small meals and snacks often. This is less tiring than eating big meals two or three times a day.



Check out the Foodswitch app. When you scan the barcodes of packaged foods, Foodswitch tells you what is in the food and recommends any healthier choices so you can make simple switches to healthier options. For more information visit www.foodswitch.co.nz

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why eating less salt and a healthy diet are important

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you:

- Feel bloated after eating small amounts of food
- Feel too tired to prepare and cook food
- Are losing weight without intending to
- Have no appetite for food.

Do you want to learn more about how to cut down on salt and eating well? Do you have special dietary requirements such as diabetes or gout? Ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian for more information or take a look at these websites:

- Diabetes New Zealand www.diabetes.org.nz
- Gout www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-topics/gout
- To find a dietitian talk to your doctor or nurse or visit www.dietitians.org.nz
- To use the Heart Foundation's Healthy heart meal planner app, visit www.heartfoundation.org.nz and search for 'Healthy heart app'.



Do I need to drink less fluid?

Many people need to limit the amount of fluid they drink each day to help control their heart failure symptoms. Talk to your doctor or nurse about the amount of fluid you should be drinking each day. Drink about the same amount each day.

Water, diluted fruit juice, lower salt soup, tea, coffee or low fat milk are all good choices.

Small steps to cutting down sugary drinks

- Decide what you can have to drink instead of sugary, fizzy drinks. Water is the best option but you may want to start by changing to diet drinks
- Gradually swap each fizzy drink for water.

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Why eating less salt and a healthy diet are important

Alcohol and your heart

Drinking too much alcohol can:

- Make your heart failure symptoms worse
- Damage your heart muscle
- Affect your heart rhythm
- Affect some of your pills
- Alter your fluid balance.

Advice from your health professional regarding alcohol and your heart

If your heart muscle has been damaged by alcohol, then you shouldn't drink any alcohol at all even when you start to feel better.

Tips for cutting back on your alcohol

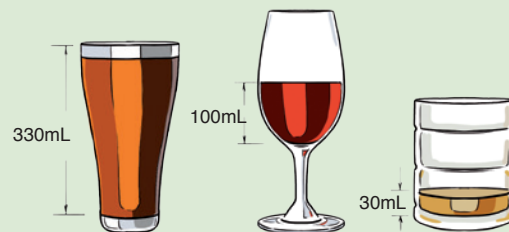
If you have got into the habit of drinking alcohol every day or evening:

- Be clear about why you want to have a drink. Is it to unwind, because you're bored, feeling stressed or anxious? If so, think about other ways to deal with these issues
- Be clear about when you want to have a drink. Is it at a particular time or in a particular situation? What can you do to avoid these?
- Make changes to your routine. Making a change to your regular routine can help break unhealthy habits
- Distract yourself – do something else you enjoy at the time you usually have a drink
- Find an alternative that you enjoy
- Don't keep a stock of alcohol at home.

A standard drink is equivalent to a:

- Can of 4% beer (330ml)
- Small glass of wine (100ml)
- Pub measure of spirits (30ml).

If you are worried about the amount you are drinking, talk to your doctor or nurse or call the **Alcohol Helpline** on **0800 787 797** for free and confidential advice.



Reaching a healthy weight

Having a healthy body weight will help you to feel better.

If you are overweight, you should focus on having a healthy, balanced diet (page 30) and regular exercise (page 25).

If you have lost weight because of your heart failure symptoms, you need to talk to your doctor or nurse so that you can avoid losing more weight and becoming too thin.

Talk to your doctor or nurse for advice if you would like support to reach a healthy weight. They may be able to refer you to a dietitian.

Tips for gaining weight

If you feel too tired to eat:

- Sit down when preparing food
- Rest before eating (page 27)
- Chop food up into bite sized portions to make eating less of an effort
- Eat small meals or snacks every two to three hours
- Make sure you are taking your pills correctly.

If you have a poor appetite:

- Choose a variety of foods that you enjoy the taste and smell of
- Add some foods which are higher in fat and carbohydrates – ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian about these
- Include high energy drinks such as Complan, Vitaplan or Sustagen® into your diet
- Chew sugar free gum – this can increase saliva and create a feeling of hunger
- If you can, eat with family/whānau or friends rather than by yourself.

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Stopping smoking

Stopping smoking

Becoming smokefree is one of the most important things that you can do for your health. More and more New Zealanders are choosing to stop smoking for themselves and their families.

You may think that it is too late to stop or that the odd cigarette won't make a difference to you now. But there is no safe level of smoking and becoming smokefree will:

- Improve the oxygen levels in your blood
- Improve your breathing
- Increase your energy levels
- Help you feel less tired
- Help you sleep better
- Prevent further damage to your lungs.

MYTH

I've tried to stop smoking before and I just can't do it – there's no point in trying again.



TRUTH

The more times you try to stop the more likely you are to be successful.

Tobacco is very addictive, so it can be really difficult to give up. The important thing is to keep trying.

There are many different ways to stop and lots of support available. So, even if you have tried before don't give up trying – you can succeed!

What support programmes are available to help me become smokefree?

- Ask your doctor or nurse about the support they can offer
- Call **Quitline** on **0800 778 778** or visit **www.quit.org.nz** for information, support and low-cost nicotine replacement therapy (NRT)
- Visit **www.aukatikaipaipa.co.nz** to find out about local programmes offering Māori and their whānau free support to stop smoking, including low-cost nicotine replacement therapy and ongoing support
- Visit **www.talapasifika.org.nz** for details of free stop smoking programmes for Pacific peoples and their families

To find out more about stopping smoking visit:

www.ash.org.nz

www.facethefacts.org.nz

www.smokefreecontacts.org.nz

www.heartfoundation.org.nz

Getting back to work

When you are feeling unwell, you may not be thinking about getting back to work. But, once you start feeling a bit better, you may want to consider it. Talk to your doctor or nurse about your job and the chance of going back to your usual work.

What can I do to help myself get back to work?

Use the 'plan for change' on page 14 to plan the steps you need to take to get back to work.

- Gradually increase your exercise before you go back to work (page 25). This will help you have more energy to do your job
- Talk to your employer as soon as possible about your plans to return to work and how they might be able to help you
- If possible, work part-time to start with. Slowly increase the number of hours you work, so that you get used to working again
- If your job is a heavy/manual one, you may need to change or adapt your job
- If your job is very stressful, think of ways to lessen the stress.

Some people will not be able to work but may be eligible for a benefit. For more information contact **Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ)** on **0800 559 009**, or visit their website: **www.workandincome.govt.nz**.

Starting to drive again

Most people with heart failure can drive a car if they feel well. It is worth checking with your insurance company that you are covered to drive.

However you should not drive if you:

- **Have been unwell and have more shortness of breath and swelling than usual.** You should wait two weeks until your symptoms are under control and you are feeling better
- **Have a history of blackouts/fainting due to an abnormal heart rhythm.** You should talk to your doctor to see if it is safe for you to drive
- **Have very high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms or are on warfarin therapy that is not well controlled.** You should talk to your doctor to see if it is safe for you to drive
- **Drive as part of your work e.g. drive a truck, taxi or bus.** You will need to be assessed by a specialist before you are allowed to return to driving for work.

For further information contact the **New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA)** on **0800 822 422**, or visit **www.nzta.govt.nz**.

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

Enjoying sex

Enjoying sex

For many people, having sex is an important part of their relationship. Once your heart failure symptoms are under control you can safely enjoy sex.

Sex is no different from any other form of exercise. It is good for your heart. Like other forms of exercise there are also a few important safety tips:

- Pick a time for sex when you feel relaxed and comfortable
- Avoid sex within two hours of eating a big meal, or three hours after drinking alcohol
- Make sure the room is warm and relaxing
- Choose positions that feel comfortable
- Avoid positions where you have to support your weight with your arms.

What if I don't feel like having sex?

If you or your partner are feeling anxious, tired or unfit, it is natural that you won't feel like having sex. If you can, talk honestly to your partner about how you are feeling. Taking more exercise (page 25) generally, will help you to get fitter and have more energy for sex.

"I was worried about having sex. I thought too much excitement would be dangerous. But it's safe and feels great."

Just like other forms of exercise you should not have sex if:

- You are feeling ill
- Are very short of breath
- You have chest pain.



Managing stress, anxiety and depression

When you have heart failure, there is a lot of focus on your physical symptoms. That's really important. But it is also really important to deal with your feelings and emotions.

Being told that you have heart failure can be a shock. Your heart failure symptoms (being short of breath and tired) can be frightening and make you feel sad, worried and depressed.

For some people these low feelings improve over time. For other people they go on for longer and may even get worse. You don't have to put up with these emotions. There are things that you can do to deal with stress, anxiety and depression and to help you enjoy life again.

What can I do to deal with stress, anxiety and depression?

1. Recognise your feelings

The first step in dealing with stress, anxiety and depression is to recognise how you are feeling and realise that your feelings are normal. You can then do things to help you feel better. Feeling stressed, anxious or depressed can affect people in different ways. It's common to have signs of all three.

Do you feel stressed, anxious or depressed? Look at the signs below. Which apply to you?

- *I have no energy*
- *I feel restless*
- *I feel sad and tearful*
- *I've lost my appetite*
- *I can't make decisions*
- *I feel weak, short of breath, sweaty and shaky*
- *I feel tired all the time*
- *I don't enjoy things like I used to*
- *I feel tense*
- *I feel bad tempered, grumpy and miserable*
- *I can't concentrate*
- *I just want to sleep all the time*
- *I'm afraid to be left alone*
- *I feel butterflies in my stomach*
- *I spend most of the time worrying*
- *I get sudden feelings of intense fear or dread*
- *I don't want to go out*
- *I eat all the time*
- *I don't sleep well*



Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

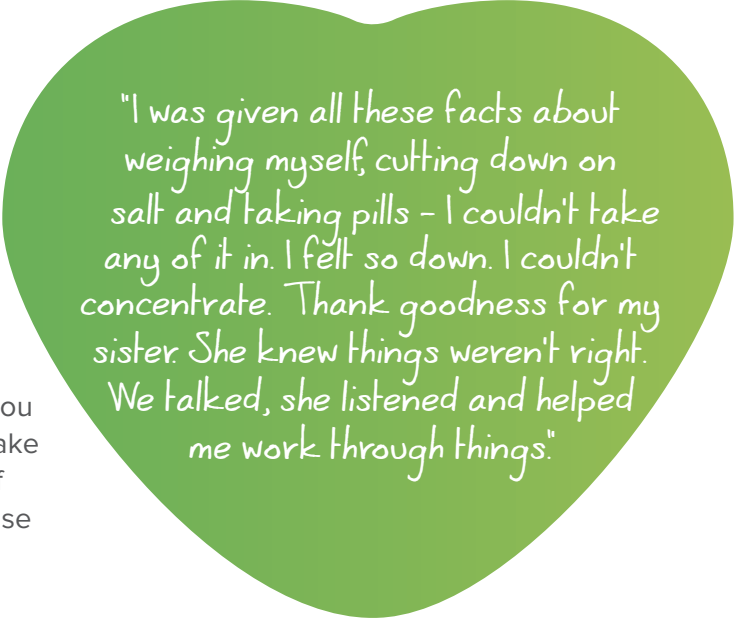
Managing stress, anxiety and depression

2. Talk to someone about how you are feeling

Talk to your partner, a close friend or family member about how you are feeling. Sometimes, just talking things through can help you feel better.

3. Take steps to tackle your feelings

Often, when you are feeling sad and low you don't feel like doing anything – even things you used to enjoy. It helps to set daily goals to make yourself do things that used to be fun, even if they aren't just now. If you keep on doing these things, you might find that you start to enjoy yourself again.



"I was given all these facts about weighing myself, cutting down on salt and taking pills – I couldn't take any of it in. I felt so down. I couldn't concentrate. Thank goodness for my sister. She knew things weren't right. We talked, she listened and helped me work through things."

Activity planning

- Plan something to look forward to every day
- Make a list of activities that you used to enjoy or made you feel good, for example, walking on the beach or reading a book
- Decide which of these activities you want to do each day
- Be realistic. It is better to do something you are able to do rather than feel bad because you've tried to do too much
- Try to write down your day's activity plan the evening before so that you have a plan of action to follow when you get up in the morning.

Do some exercise every day

When you feel down you don't feel like taking exercise. But getting out into the fresh air and being active can really help to lift your mood. Look at page 25 to find out how you can ease into exercise.

Think about relaxation

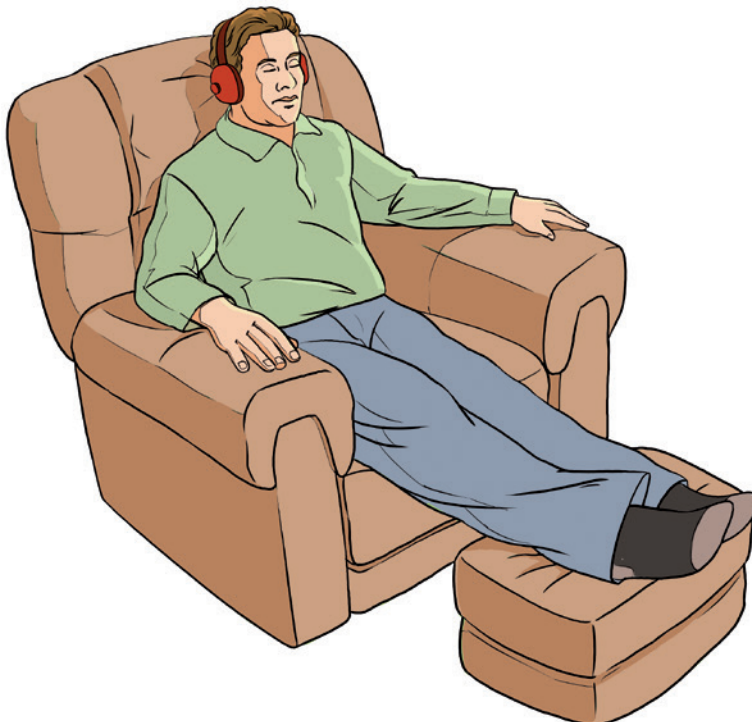
Being relaxed is not the same as kicking your shoes off, lying on the sofa and having a beer or wine. Relaxation and breathing exercises affect certain chemicals in your body and can help you feel calm.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about relaxation exercises which might help you. You can often find good relaxation CDs in libraries and bookshops.

"I'd wake up at night and I couldn't get my breath. The more I panicked the worse it got. Relaxation exercises have helped me to control my breathing and my anxiety."

When should I get help?

If you find you are still feeling really low after a few weeks or if you or your family are worried, talk to your doctor or nurse. You may need to be referred to someone who can help you and/or you may need medication for a while.



If you would like more information on dealing with stress, anxiety and depression or helping someone manage these feelings contact the **Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand: www.mentalhealth.org.nz or www.depression.org.nz**

Step 3: Find information, tools and support to achieve my plans

My angina action plan / Heart attack warning signs

My angina action plan

If you think you are having angina, and usually take GTN spray or tablets:

- Stop what you are doing. Sit down and take 1 puff of your GTN spray or 1 GTN tablet, under your tongue
- If your angina is relieved by rest or your GTN spray or tablet, you can resume your activities gently
- If your angina persists, you can take 1 more puff of your GTN spray or 1 GTN tablet after 5 minutes
- **If your angina is not relieved after a further 5 minutes, treat as a heart attack – call an ambulance. Dial 111 immediately.**

If your angina becomes more frequent, severe, lasts longer or happens when you are doing very little or resting, see your doctor in the next 24 hours.

Heart attack warning signs

Symptoms of a heart attack vary considerably from person to person. You may experience the following symptoms:

- Heavy pressure, tightness, crushing pain or unusual discomfort in the centre of the chest, lasting more than 10 minutes
- Typically the pain may spread to the neck, jaw, shoulders and arms

This may be accompanied by sweating, a sick feeling in the stomach, dizziness, fatigue or shortness of breath.

When it's a heart attack, minutes do matter.

My heart attack action plan

You can't take chances with your heart, if you think there might be something wrong:



Call 111, ask for the ambulance service and tell them you are having a possible heart attack



Chew an aspirin, unless you have been told not to in the past



Unlock the front door and rest until the ambulance arrives.

Remember, **minutes matter**. The sooner you get to hospital the more heart muscle they can save. It really is that important.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE To make a difference

Fund vital education and research

When you support the Heart Foundation you make a difference to the lives of thousands of New Zealanders – young and old.

Your dollar helps fund education programmes in schools to put Kiwi kids on a heart healthy path as well as, vital research to save lives and advance cardiac care. To date we have contributed more than \$50 million to heart research projects, much of which is about early detection of heart health problems, effective assessment and management.

Help us fight heart disease!

Please take a moment to donate



www.heartfoundation.org.nz/donate



Phone us on 0800 830 100

Thank you for your support. Every dollar makes a DIFFERENCE!

Heart Foundation, PO Box 17160, Greenlane, Auckland 1546

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Revised and printed October 2014

ISBN 978-1-877465-59-8 (paperback) ISBN 978-1-877465-60-4 (pdf)

The Heart Foundation of New Zealand is a registered charity (CC23052) under the Charities Act 2005.