

Daily actions to help manage your heart failure

Consumer Brochure

Heart failure is a long-term condition that can be best managed by taking daily actions under the guidance of your GP and heart specialist (cardiologist).

Learning about your heart failure, taking an active role, and using the available supports can help you to feel better, live longer and stay out of hospital.

Heart failure results from your heart becoming weaker and not being able to pump blood around your body as well as it should. The causes include heart attack (myocardial infarction) or damage from inadequately controlled high blood pressure or other conditions affecting the heart. Heart failure can lead to fluid build-up (oedema) in your body which can cause rapid weight gain, and your feet, legs and abdomen to swell. Symptoms can range from mild to severe. You might feel breathless and tired when doing daily activities or even while resting. ●

Take your medicines as prescribed

Most people with heart failure need to take a combination of medicines. Medicines for heart failure can make it easier for your heart to pump blood around your body, help you have more energy and feel better, and importantly can help keep you out of hospital and lengthen your life. >



Here are some tips for taking your heart failure medicines:

- **Take all of your medicines every day as prescribed.**
Make sure you have enough medicines to last if you are going away. Your GP or cardiologist might change the dose from time to time. Always follow the instructions carefully and contact your GP if you have any questions.
- **Always check with your GP or pharmacist before taking any new medicines** or supplements not prescribed by a doctor. This includes medicines you buy from a supermarket, health food store or online such as over-the-counter cold and flu tablets and anti-inflammatory medicines for pain.
- **Keep an up-to-date list of your medicines** that you can access easily. Take it with you whenever you visit your GP, pharmacist, cardiologist or any other health professionals you see.
 - You can write your own list, ask your pharmacist for an up-to-date list, or download the free [MedicineWise app](#).
 - Keep a current [health summary](#) and list of current medicines on your fridge or somewhere you can easily access in case you need to call an ambulance. Your GP can help with these.
- **Ask your GP about having a [Medicines Review](#).** It can be a challenge to keep track of the many medicines you might need to take for your heart. A pharmacist can answer any of your questions together with your GP to make sure you are getting the best from your heart medicines. ●



Free MedicineWise app



Heart Foundation list

Do your daily checks

Do your daily checks to help identify when you need to contact your GP and healthcare team.



Keep a daily written record of your weight. Use digital scales to weigh yourself in the morning, after you have gone to the toilet but before breakfast. Rapid increase in weight is caused by build-up of fluid, not of fat, and is a sign that your degree of heart failure is increasing. Know what your 'good' or 'healthy' weight is and contact your doctor if your weight increases by more than 2kg in two days. >



Look for signs of swelling. Does your waistband or socks feel tight? Do you find it difficult to fit your shoes on? Do the rings on your fingers feel tighter? If you press firmly into your ankle, shin or knee with your finger, does it leave a dent in your skin?



Look for changes in your breathing. Are you using more pillows at night or having to sit upright to breathe more easily? Are you more short of breath than usual? Are you coughing more often or do you have a new cough? Are you finding it difficult to carry on a normal conversation without feeling breathless?



Your doctor may suggest that you keep track of your fluid intake. Use a calendar or diary to track your fluid intake. Remember to include all your fluids, even the ones you take your medicines with. Many foods also contain fluid. See the [‘Living well with heart failure’](#) brochure for further information and examples.



Living well with
heart failure

Pay attention

When your symptoms indicate you need to check in with your doctor or healthcare team (and may need a change in your medicines):

- dry, hacking cough
- worsening shortness of breath with activity
- increased swelling
- sudden weight gain (more than 2kg in 24 hours)
- shortness of breath trying to sleep
- discomfort or swelling in your abdomen

Warning

Call 000 for an ambulance immediately if you suddenly become short of breath, cough frothy phlegm, experience faintness or have chest pain. You need to be evaluated right away. ●



What other steps can I take?

Keeping active and making healthy choices each day can help strengthen your heart, improve your mood and give you more energy.

- **Keep moving.** Regular physical activity such as walking and strength exercises can help strengthen your heart and give you more energy. Talk to your GP about the sort of exercises that are safe and suitable for [you](#). Be active across the day by getting up and moving around. It is important to slowly build up. Your GP might suggest you do a specialised heart failure management program to help you start exercising safely.
- **Keep connected.** Keep connected with your health professionals and family and friends. The [MyHeart MyLife program](#) is a free support program by the National Heart Foundation for people with heart disease. It's OK to ask for help. If you are finding it harder to cope or [feeling sad or worried](#), talk to a family member or friend or your GP.
- **Have a heart failure action plan.** Developing a plan for your care in partnership with your GP and healthcare team can improve your health and help keep you out of hospital. Talk to your GP about a personalised care plan for you. They might suggest you arrange a specific appointment to arrange this plan.
- **Eat less salty foods.** The Heart Foundation recommends reducing salt to less than 1 level teaspoon (5gm) per day. This is often listed as sodium and is hidden in many processed foods.
- **Make other lifestyle changes if needed.** Limiting alcohol intake and quitting smoking or vaping can improve your heart health. Talk to your GP or pharmacist about options for quitting. For many people, not drinking any alcohol at all is the safest option.
- **Keep your vaccinations up-to-date.** Influenza (flu), pneumonia and COVID are serious if you have heart failure. Have a flu vaccine every year (usually in March or April). Talk to your GP about keeping your pneumococcal and COVID-19 vaccines up-to-date. ●



What is cardiac rehab?
Heart Foundation



MyHeart MyLife
program



Anxiety, Depression and
Suicide Prevention.
Beyond Blue

Having a Medicines Review

What to expect?



Step 1

You, a family member, carer, nurse, pharmacist or your GP may suggest a Medicines Review.



Step 2

If you and your GP agree to a Medicines Review, your GP will refer you to a credentialed pharmacist.



Step 3

The pharmacist will contact you to organise a suitable time and place for the Medicines Review.



The review is usually conducted in your home. You can ask the pharmacist to wear a mask during the visit if it makes you more comfortable.



Step 4

At the Medicines Review you and the pharmacist will spend time talking about your medicines. You can have a family member, friend or carer present.



Step 5

After the review, the pharmacist will send your GP a report. This may include suggestions to change your medicines.



Step 6

You will need to make a specific appointment with your GP to discuss the Medicines Review report and develop a written Medication Management Plan.

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Supporting quality use
of medicines.