

# Living well with chronic heart failure

## What is chronic heart failure?

Chronic heart failure is an ongoing condition in which the heart muscle is weakened and can't pump as well as it normally does. While it can be life-threatening, you can control the symptoms, avoid unnecessary hospital visits and live a longer, healthier life by taking charge of your condition and working in partnership with your healthcare team.

## Symptoms of chronic heart failure

Common symptoms of chronic heart failure include shortness of breath, tiredness, weight gain and swelling of the ankles and/or belly. It is important to talk to your doctor or heart failure nurse about any new or worsening symptoms.

## How to manage chronic heart failure

### The three main things you can do are:

1. **Take your medicines as prescribed.** You may be prescribed a number of medicines. If you feel your medicines are not working or are causing you problems, or you have any questions, talk to your doctor, heart failure nurse or pharmacist.
2. **Monitor and control your fluid balance.** This includes a daily routine of weighing yourself, controlling your fluid intake, limiting your salt intake and taking medicines (diuretics) as prescribed.
3. **Make some long-term lifestyle changes.** It is important to be smoke-free, limit caffeinated drinks and alcohol, enjoy healthy eating, be physically active and achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.

You may also be able to attend a specialised program that will help you manage your condition and avoid future hospital stays.

Living with chronic heart failure can be challenging, and it is normal to feel worried, sad or 'down' from time to time. However, if you are feeling sad or miserable most of the time you should talk to your doctor, as depression is a treatable condition that affects many people with chronic heart failure.

### Turn this page over for a summary of your daily routine and advice about when to seek medical attention.

The Heart Foundation's 'Living well with chronic heart failure' booklet explains chronic heart failure and its management in more detail. It offers practical tips on controlling symptoms and managing fluid balance, and answers some of the questions people with chronic heart failure often ask. It will help you to better understand your condition and its treatment, and can help guide your discussions with your healthcare team. To obtain a copy of this booklet, call the Heart Foundation on 1300 36 27 87.

# Chronic heart failure action plan

**Note:** It is important that you develop an individualised action plan with your healthcare team that takes into account the severity of your heart failure, any other health problems you may also have, and your health care preferences.

## Every day:

- Weigh yourself and keep track of your weight.
- Restrict your fluid intake and salt intake as recommended by your doctor.
- Take your medicines as prescribed.
- Be physically active.
- Remember to call for medical assistance when the need arises (see below).

## Call your doctor or heart failure nurse as soon as possible if:

- you gain or lose more than 2 kilograms over 2 days
- you have worsening shortness of breath with your normal activities
- your heart is beating very quickly
- you are very dizzy, or you pass out (faint)
- your angina is getting worse
- there is increased swelling in your ankles, legs or abdomen
- you are coughing a lot – especially at night
- you are generally feeling more tired or sad than usual.

## When you have angina:

- Immediately stop and rest.
- If rest alone does not bring rapid or effective relief, take a dose of your angina medicine
- If the angina is not relieved within 5 minutes, take another dose of your angina medicine
- If the angina is not completely relieved within 10 minutes of onset by rest and medicine OR is severe OR gets worse quickly, **this is an emergency. Get help fast. Call triple zero (000)\* and ask for an ambulance.** Don't hang up. Wait for advice from the 000 operator.

\*If calling 000 does not work on your mobile phone, try 112.

## Call triple zero (000)\* and ask for an ambulance if:

You suddenly have severe shortness of breath, or you are experiencing new 'blackouts'  
\*If calling 000 does not work on your mobile phone, try 112.

For more information, refer to the source of this action plan—the Heart Foundation booklet 'Living well with chronic heart failure'.

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