Living Well With Heart Failure

A guide to understanding, managing, and caring for your heart

CENTRAL HEALTH

Heart failure happens when your heart is too weak or too stiff to pump enough blood for your body. This booklet explains what heart failure is, what can cause it, and how doctors find and treat it.

You will also learn how to care for yourself at home, what to do if you start to feel sick, and how healthy eating, staying active, and taking your medicine can help you live well.

Learning about heart failure and following your care plan can help you feel better, stay active, and protect your heart.



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How Heart Failure Affects Your Heart

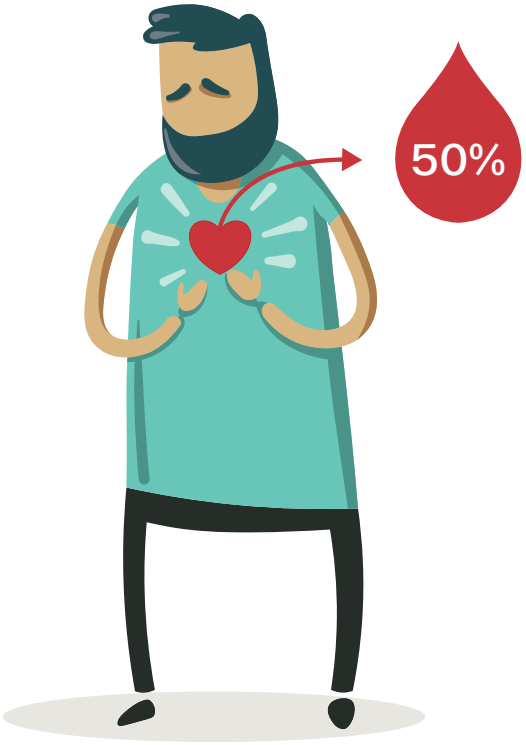
Heart failure happens when your heart muscle does not pump blood as well as it should. The heart can be too weak or too stiff to pump efficiently.

- When the heart does not pump enough blood, fluid can back up in the body.
- Fluid may build up in the lungs, making it hard to breathe.
- Fluid may also build up in the legs and belly, causing swelling and weight gain.

Heart failure can keep the body from getting enough oxygen and can cause fluid to build up in many areas. Over time, a weak or stiff heart can make other organs work harder and may cause damage.

Ejection fraction is a way to see how well your heart works. It shows how much blood your heart sends out with every beat.

- Doctors use an echocardiogram (a heart ultrasound) to measure it.
- A normal ejection fraction is above 50 percent. If it is lower, your heart may be weaker.
- You can still have heart failure even with a normal ejection fraction.



Heart failure can sometimes improve with medicine, certain heart procedures, or by treating the cause. Without treatment, it can slowly get worse and may become life-threatening.

Three Main Types of Heart Failure

Every person's heart failure is a little different. Knowing which type you have helps your care team choose the best treatment for you.

Left-sided heart failure

The left ventricle is the main pumping chamber of the heart. It sends blood to the rest of the body and most organs. If the left ventricle is weak, stiff, or thick, the heart cannot pump blood well. This can cause fluid to build up in the lungs and body.

There are two main types of left-sided heart failure. One happens when the heart muscle is weak. The other happens when the heart muscle is stiff.

1 Weak heart muscle

When the heart muscle is weak, it pumps out less blood with each beat. This is called Heart Failure with Reduced Ejection Fraction (HFrEF). A weak heart has an ejection fraction of less than 50 percent.

Common causes include:

- Blocked heart arteries or a past heart attack
- Irregular heartbeats (arrhythmia)
- Heart valve problems
- Alcohol use
- Stimulant drug use
- Certain viral infections
- Thyroid problems
- Some cancer medicines
- Genetic (inherited) causes

2 Stiff heart muscle

A stiff or thickened heart muscle can make your heart become stiff because it fills up with blood and cannot relax between beats.

This is called Heart Failure with Preserved Ejection Fraction (HFpEF) or diastolic heart failure. In this type, ejection fraction is preserved or normal—above 50 percent.

Because the heart does not fill completely, blood and fluid can back up in the lungs and body, making it hard to breathe and causing swelling.

3 Right-sided heart failure

Lung disease and other heart problems can make the right side of the heart weak. When this happens, fluid often builds up in the legs and belly, causing swelling.

Common Causes of Heart Failure

The most common causes of heart failure are:

1. Blocked heart arteries (cholesterol buildup or coronary artery disease)
2. High blood pressure
3. Irregular heartbeat (called atrial fibrillation)

Other causes may include:

- Using drugs such as meth or cocaine
- Heart infection (myocarditis)
- Too much thyroid hormone (hyperthyroidism)
- Cancer medicines (chemotherapy)
- Heart valve problems
- In some people, no cause is found, or it may run in families

Risk factors for heart failure



Smoking



Diabetes



High cholesterol



Being overweight



Alcohol & stimulant drug use



Sleep apnea



Lowering these risk factors can help prevent heart failure from getting worse. Living a heart-healthy life means:

- Staying at a healthy weight
- Being active
- Eating foods low in fat and salt

These steps can ease symptoms and protect your heart.

What are your symptoms

- ☐ Shortness of breath with activity or when lying down
- ☐ Chest pain or tightness
- ☐ Persistent cough or wheezing
- ☐ Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- ☐ Swelling in the legs, ankles and feet
- ☐ Belly swelling
- ☐ Nausea or loss of appetite
- ☐ Very fast weight gain from fluid buildup
- ☐ Trouble exercising
- ☐ Feeling tired or weak
- ☐ Feeling confused or less alert



How Heart Failure Is Found

Doctors find out if you have heart failure by doing a physical exam and several basic tests, such as a blood test, chest X-ray, and echocardiogram. These tests help your care team learn how well your heart is working.

Medical history and physical exam

Your doctor will go through your medical history and will perform a physical exam.

This helps your care team learn about your symptoms, medicines, and any other health problems that could affect your heart.

Blood tests

A small amount of blood is taken from your arm.

The lab checks your blood for certain substances, such as:

- Sodium and potassium (electrolytes): show how your body handles fluid
- Albumin (a type of protein): shows nutrition and liver function
- Cholesterol and triglycerides: show blood fat levels
- Creatinine: shows kidney function
- BNP or NT-proBNP: special markers that show how stressed the heart is

Abnormal results may mean the heart or other organs, such as the kidneys or liver, are under strain.

Chest X-ray

A chest X-ray may be done in your doctor's office or in a radiology lab. It shows:

- If the heart is larger than normal
- If there is fluid in the lungs

Echocardiogram

An echocardiogram is a heart ultrasound that takes moving pictures of your heart.

It shows how well the heart pumps and how the valves open and close. It can also measure your ejection fraction (EF), which is how much blood the heart pushes out with each beat.

These results help doctors confirm if you have heart failure and what type you have (HFrEF or HFpEF). Your heart doctor may also order a stress test or a heart catheterization. These tests help find out if there are blockages in your heart arteries.

How Heart Failure Is Treated

Treatment for heart failure depends on the type you have. It may include medicines, lifestyle changes, and sometimes medical procedures.

Your doctor will talk with you about what kind of treatment is right for you.

Medicines

There are several kinds of medicines used to treat heart failure. Some remove extra fluid, while others help the heart work better over time.

Treats fluid retention

These medicines are also called diuretics or water pills. They help your body get rid of extra fluid by making you urinate more often. Removing extra fluid helps lower stress on your heart, reduces swelling, and makes you feel better.

Common diuretics include:

- Furosemide (Lasix)
- Bumetanide (Bumex)
- Torsemide (Demadex)

Supports heart function

There are four (4) main groups of heart failure medicines that help your heart improve over time. They can help you live longer and feel better with heart failure.

1 **Beta Blockers**
Examples: Metoprolol, Carvedilol

These medicines slow your heart rate, so the heart does not have to work as hard.

2 **RAAS Inhibitors**
Examples: Losartan, Entresto (valsartan/sacubitril), Valsartan, Candesartan, Lisinopril, Benazepril, Ramipril

These medicines help your heart stay strong and lower your risk of future hospital visits.

3 **Aldosterone Antagonists**
Examples: Spironolactone, Eplerenone

These medicines help make the heart stronger.

4 **SGLT2 Inhibitors**
Examples: Jardiance, Farxiga, Invokana

These medicines are a newer type that can help lower the risk of being hospitalized for heart failure.

Procedures & surgeries

In some cases, your heart doctor may recommend a procedure or surgery to help your heart work better. These treatments can improve heart function, ease symptoms, and help prevent early death. Your doctor will explain what you need and what to expect before, during, and after the procedure.

Procedure	Purpose
Cardiac catheterization	• A blocked artery can make the heart weak. • Doctors check for blockages in the heart arteries using a special dye and X-ray images. • Opening a blocked artery can help the heart work better. • If needed, a stent (a small metal tube) may be placed to keep the artery open.
Transesophageal ultrasound	• This test takes a close look at your heart using sound waves. • The doctor inserts a soft ultrasound wand through your throat (food pipe) to get clear pictures of the heart.
Cardioversion	• Sometimes heart failure is caused by an irregular heartbeat, such as atrial fibrillation. • This treatment uses a short, controlled electric shock to help the heart return to a normal rhythm.
Bypass surgery	• If there are too many blocked heart arteries, doctors may recommend bypass surgery. • During the surgery, doctors use a vein or artery from another part of your body to go around the blocked area and restore blood flow.
Valve repair or replacement	• If a heart valve is blocked or leaking, it may need to be repaired or replaced. • This can be done through a small incision (minimally invasive) or through open-heart surgery.
Pacemaker or defibrillator placement	• These small devices help control dangerous heart rhythms. • They can prevent sudden death by keeping the heartbeat steady and safe.

Home self-care for heart failure

You can take steps at home to help your heart stay healthy. Follow the daily steps below.



Medicine

Take your medicine exactly as your doctor prescribed.

Do not skip doses. Missing medicine can make your heart failure worse and cause symptoms to return.



Weigh yourself every day

Know your dry weight, which is your normal weight when you are not holding extra fluid.

Weigh yourself every morning after you urinate and before you eat.

Write your weight down each day so you can see changes over time.

- If you gain two (2) pounds in one day or five (5) pounds in one week, call your doctor.
- Fast weight gain may mean your body is holding on to fluid, and your medicines may need to be adjusted.



Check blood pressure & heart rate regularly

Some heart medicines can change your blood pressure and heart rate.

Check them every day, around the same time, at least one (1) hour after taking your medicine.

Keep a record and bring it to every appointment.



Diet & exercise

Eat heart-healthy foods that are low in salt and fat.

Stay active with safe physical activity, such as walking.

If you cannot exercise easily, talk with your doctor about other ways to stay active.

What to Do if You Feel Sick

If you notice new or worsening symptoms such as shortness of breath, swelling in your legs, or sudden weight gain, your heart failure may be getting worse.

Follow these steps right away, in this order:

1 **Track your weight**
Weigh yourself every morning after you urinate and before you eat.

If your weight increases by two (2) pounds in one (1) day or five (5) pounds in one (1) week, call your doctor. This may mean your body is holding on to extra fluid.

2 **Record your numbers**
Write down your weight, blood pressure, and heart rate every day.

Bring your log to each appointment so your care team can see any changes.

3 **Call for nurse support**
Call the Patient Navigation Center at 512.978.8130 and ask to speak with a nurse. They can help you manage your symptoms, schedule an appointment, or arrange transportation.

4 **Go to the hospital if needed**
Go to the hospital for treatment if you have any of the following:

- Severe shortness of breath, even while resting.
- Fainting or feeling like you might pass out.
- Chest pain that does not go away.
- Systolic (top number) blood pressure below 90.
- Systolic (top number) blood pressure above 200.
- Heart rate above 120 beats per minute with dizziness or weakness.

Outlook for Heart Failure

Having heart failure does not mean your life is over.

With treatment, you can live an active and fulfilling life. You may still work, spend time with family, and do the things you enjoy.

How long you live and how you feel with heart failure can vary for each person.

Your outlook depends on several things:

- Your risk factors
- How well your heart is pumping blood (ejection fraction)
- How severe your symptoms are
- How well your heart responds to treatment
- How closely you follow your treatment plan—taking medicines as prescribed, going to appointments, and tracking your weight, blood pressure, and heart rate
- Eating foods that are low in salt to help reduce fluid buildup and support your heart

Taking your medicines, staying active, eating healthy foods, and seeing your doctor regularly can help you live well with heart failure.



Managing Fluids and Heart Failure

Fluid can build up in your body when your heart does not pump blood as well as it should.

Too much fluid can cause swelling, weight gain, and shortness of breath.

Your doctor may ask you to limit how much fluid you drink each day and to track your daily weight.

Track your fluid intake

Your doctor will tell you if you need to limit the amount of fluid you drink in a day.

Use a cup or container to help measure and track your fluid intake. Write down how much you drink each day.

Remember to count everything that is liquid or melts into liquid, such as:

- Water, juice, milk, coffee, and tea
- Soup and broth
- Ice cream, gelatin, sherbet, and popsicles
- Milk on cereal

Talk with your doctor about whether alcohol is safe for you.

My daily fluid limit: _____ mL/day

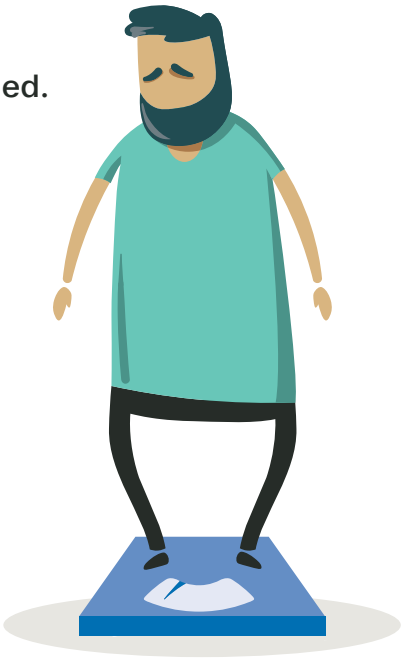
Track your weight

Weigh yourself every morning after you urinate and before you eat. This shows your "dry weight," or your normal weight when your body is not holding on to extra fluid.

If your weight goes up two (2) pounds in one (1) day or five (5) pounds in one (1) week, call your doctor.

A fast weight gain may mean your body is holding on to too much fluid.

Keeping a written log of your weight and fluid intake can help your doctor adjust your care plan and medicines as needed.



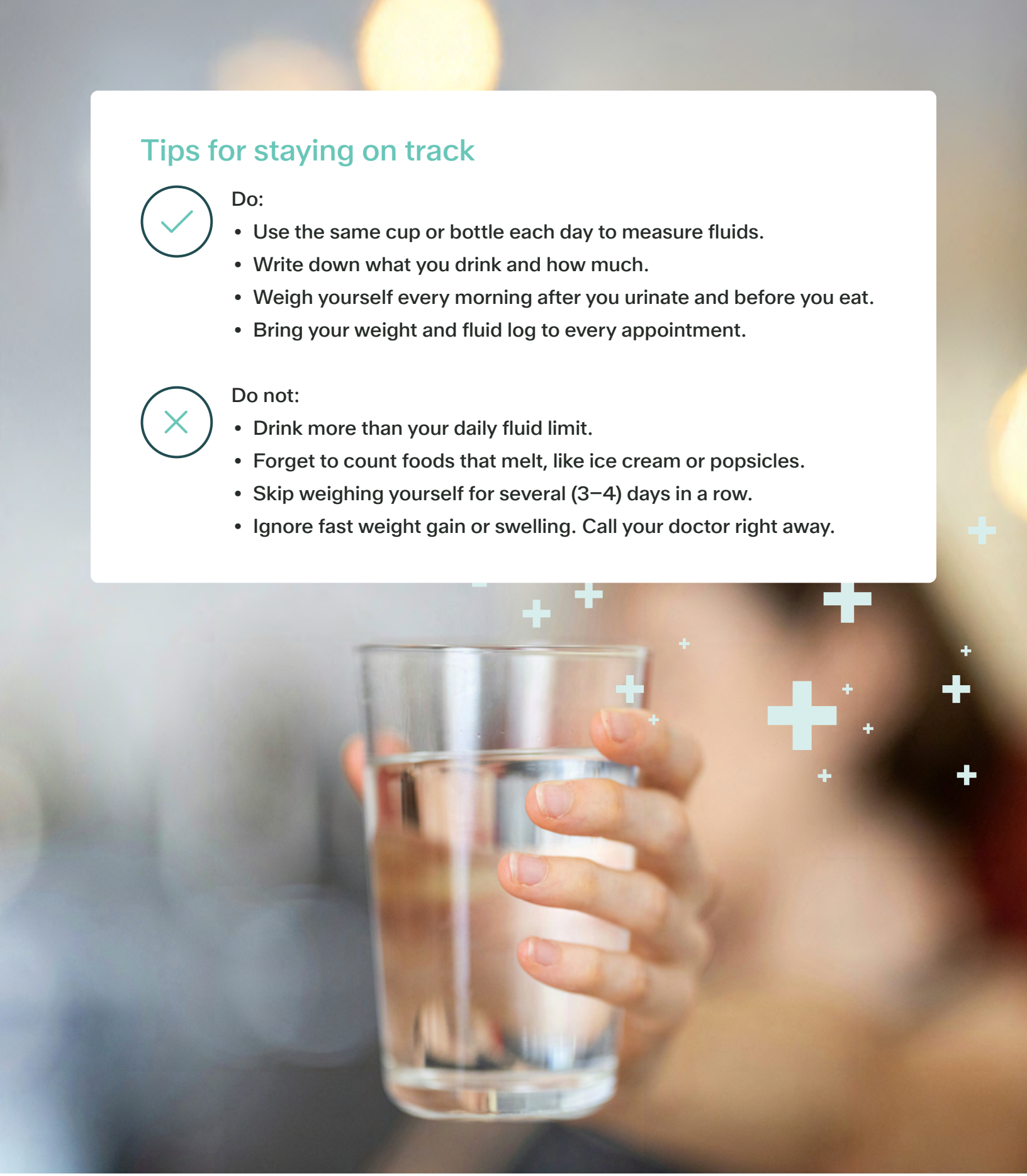
Tips for staying on track

Do:

- Use the same cup or bottle each day to measure fluids.
- Write down what you drink and how much.
- Weigh yourself every morning after you urinate and before you eat.
- Bring your weight and fluid log to every appointment.

Do not:

- Drink more than your daily fluid limit.
- Forget to count foods that melt, like ice cream or popsicles.
- Skip weighing yourself for several (3–4) days in a row.
- Ignore fast weight gain or swelling. Call your doctor right away.



Home Self-Care Tips

Read labels

When choosing what to eat, look at the Nutrition Facts label on the package.

- Find the line that says Sodium (sodium means salt).
- Look at the number. If it is more than 300 mg per serving, then consider another option. That food is too high in salt.
- Choose foods with 300 mg or less per serving.
- Do not eat more than 2,000 mg of sodium in one (1) day.



Nutrition Facts

6 servings per container

Serving size **1 cup (230g)**

Amount per serving

Calories **245**

	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	**14%**
Saturated Fat 2g	**10%**
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 8mg	**3%**
Sodium 210mg	**9%**
Total Carbohydrate 34g	**12%**
Dietary Fiber 7g	**25%**
Total Sugars 5g	
Includes 4g Added Sugars	**8%**
Protein 11g	
Vitamin D 4mcg	20%
Calcium 210mg	16%
Iron 3mg	15%
Potassium 380mg	8%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

Compare brands

The same type of food can have different amounts of salt.

Check more than one brand and choose the one with the lowest sodium.

Check your pantry

Look at the foods you already have at home and check their labels.

If a food is high in salt, eat it less often and buy a lower-salt option next time.

Examples of high-salt foods:

- Pizza
- Enchiladas
- Refried beans
- Chips
- Prepared spaghetti
- Burgers and fries
- Soy sauce
- Lunch meat
- White bread
- Cheese

Limiting Foods High in Sodium

The word sodium means salt. Too much salt can cause your body to hold on to fluid and make your heart work harder.

You should not eat more than 2,000 mg (about one-half [1/2] teaspoon) of salt in one (1) day.

This includes the salt already in your food and any extra you might add at the table.

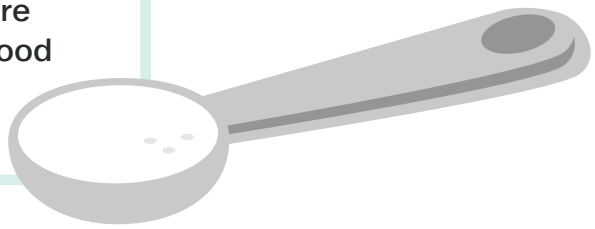
Tips for eating less salt

- Read food labels. Keep track of how much sodium you eat each day.
- Avoid adding salt at the table. Try not to use the salt shaker.
- Choose fresh foods. Fresh meats, chicken, fish, fruits, and vegetables have less sodium than canned or packaged foods.
- Limit processed foods. Packaged items such as canned soups, sauces, cheese, crackers, lunch meats, and frozen meals are often high in salt. The more processed a food is, the more sodium it usually contains.

1/2 teaspoon
amount of salt per day

2000 mg is equivalent to a 1/2 teaspoon.

This is sodium that is already included in your daily food.



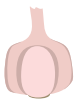
Other seasonings instead of salt



Rosemary



Onion



Garlic



Lemon



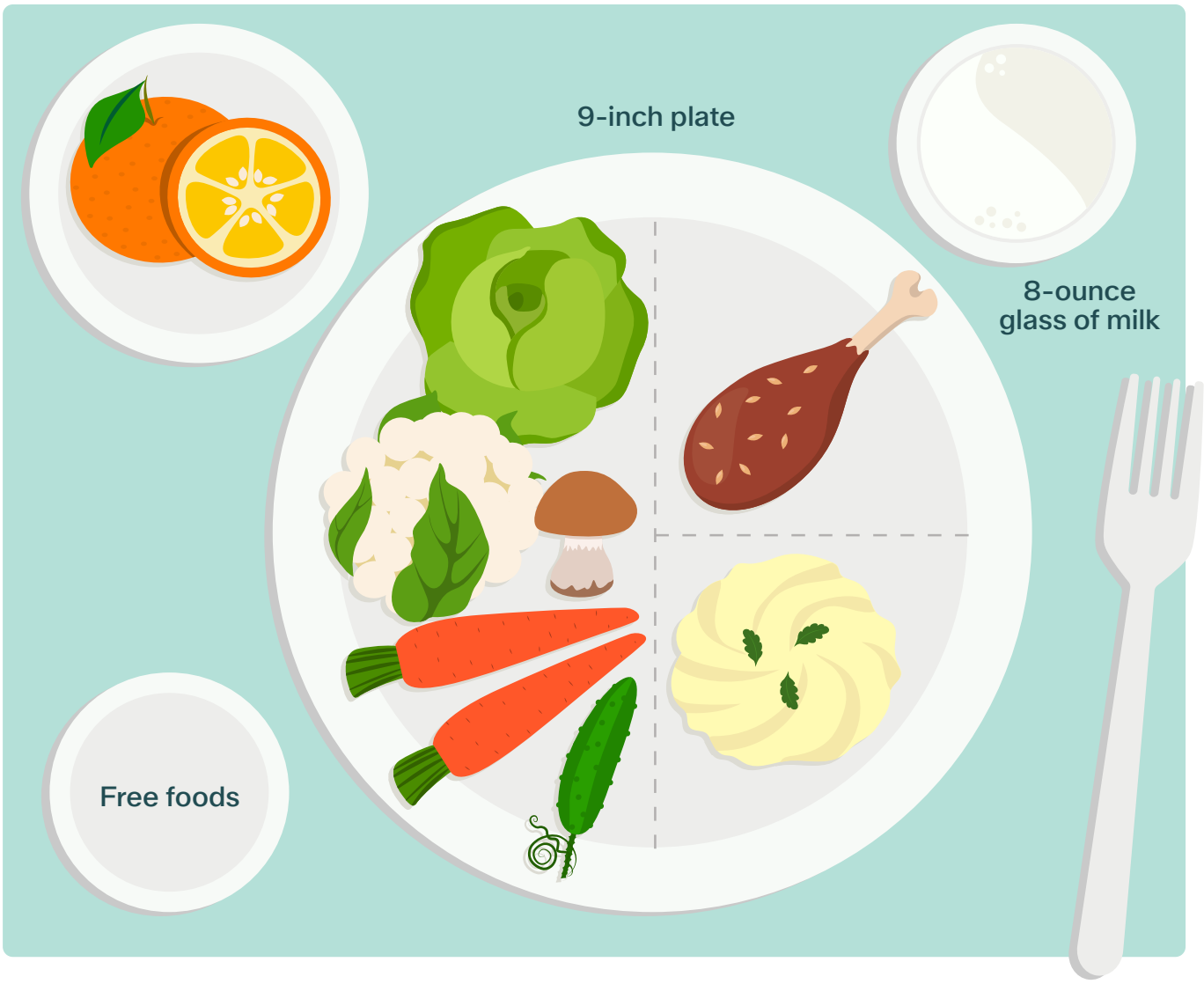
Pepper



Dash products

You can add flavor to food without using salt. Using rosemary, onions, garlic, lemon, pepper, Dash products can help add flavor to food without adding more salt. Cooking methods like grilling or roasting can also bring out flavor without adding salt.

My Plate Planner



How to use this planner

- Fill half your plate with different vegetables and fruits.
- Fill one-quarter (1/4) of your plate with a lean protein, such as chicken or fish (about 3 ounces).
- Fill one-quarter (1/4) of your plate with a starchy food, such as brown rice or potatoes.
- Use a small amount of healthy oil when cooking, such as olive oil or avocado oil (about 1 tablespoon).

Meal planning guidelines

Carbohydrates

Choose any three (3) servings at each meal.* Choices include breads and starches, fruits, some vegetables, and milk/dairy. If your meal plan is different, adjust the number of servings accordingly.

Examples of servings are listed below.

Whole grains

- 1 slice whole-wheat bread
- 1/3 cup brown rice or wheat pasta
- 1/2 cup oatmeal or potatoes
- 3/4 cup dry cereal

Vegetables and fruits

- 1 cup raw vegetables
- 1/2 cup cooked vegetables
- 1 small fruit (such as an apple or pear)
- 1 cup fresh fruit
- 1/2 cup canned fruit in juice
- 1/2 cup fruit juice

Dairy products

- 1 cup low-fat milk (1% or 2%)
- 1 cup soy milk

Protein

Choose 1–3 ounces of lean protein at each meal.*

Examples of one serving:

- 1 ounce of lean meat, such as chicken or fish
- 1 egg or egg white
- 1 ounce cheese
- 1/4 cup low-fat cottage cheese

Fats and oils

Choose 1–2 servings at each meal.*

Examples of one serving:

- 1 tablespoon oil, margarine, or butter
- 1 tablespoon salad dressing or mayonnaise

Free foods

Foods with fewer than 20 calories per serving.

Use as desired*:

- Most vegetables
- Sugar-free soda
- Black coffee or plain tea

* Note: If you have a personalized meal plan, the number of servings you choose per meal may be different.

What a serving looks like

1 cup
- A baseball or fist
- Good for: cooked rice, pasta, vegetables, cereal, milk



1/2 cup
- A light bulb or tennis ball
- Good for: fruit, yogurt, beans, mashed potatoes



1/3 cup
- An egg
- Good for: granola, shredded cheese, sauces



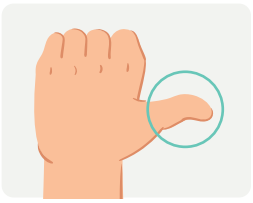
1/4 cup
- Four dice
- Good for: grains, cereal, shredded cheese



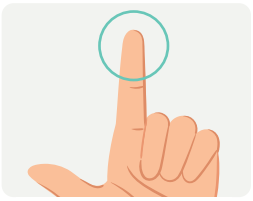
2 tablespoons
- A golf ball
- Good for: peanut butter, salad dressing



1 tablespoon
- Your thumb (from knuckle to tip)
- Good for: oil, butter, mayonnaise



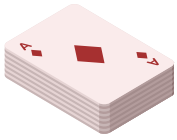
1 teaspoon
- Your fingertip (about the size of a dice)
- Good for: sugar, mustard, spices



1 ounce
- A pair of dice or a slice of cheese
- Good for: nuts, cheese, chocolate

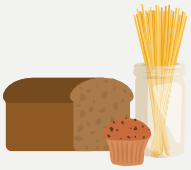


3 ounces
- A deck of cards or the palm of your hand (no fingers)
- Good for: meat, fish, chicken



Managing Your Diet

	Foods to choose	Foods to limit
Vegetables 	• Fresh and/or frozen vegetables • Canned vegetables rinsed with water before cooking • "No added salt" canned vegetables	• Canned vegetables in salt • Vegetables cooked with solid fats like bacon, salt pork, or butter • Fried vegetables • Canned soups
Fruits 	• Fresh and/or frozen fruits • Canned fruits rinsed with water before cooking	• Candied fruits • Canned fruits in heavy syrup • Fruit pies/cobblers
Meats & proteins 	• Lean beef products with less than 7% total fat • Chicken without skin, white meat preferred • Canned tuna or salmon rinsed • Fresh eggs or egg substitutes • Beans cooked without salt • Natural peanut butter	• Regular beef products with more than 10% total fat • Chicken with skin, dark meat • Fried meats • Canned tuna or salmon in oil • Lunch meats and hot dogs • Bacon (any type) • Beef Jerky • Fried eggs • Regular quiche • Beans cooked with salt • Refried Beans • Frozen dinners with more than 300 mg (about the weight of ten grains of rice) salt per serving
Milk products 	• Low-fat milk (skim or 2%) • Low-fat yogurt • Soft cheeses such as cottage cheese and mozzarella	• Whole milk (4%) • Regular-fat yogurt • Regular cheeses such cheddar and American

	Foods to choose	Foods to limit
Breads/grains 	• Rice • Regular oatmeal • Pasta • Potatoes cooked without salt • Cold cereal • Whole wheat breads • Unsalted crackers • Unsalted popcorn • Corn tortillas • Homemade muffins • Cornbread (without salt)	• White bread • Flour tortillas • Biscuits • Pie crust • Cookies
Fats & oils 	• Unsalted butter/margarine • Olive oil	• Soy sauce • Mayonnaise • Olives • Salted nuts • Regular butter/margarine • Salad dressings • Lard • Salsa • Ketchup
Beverages 	• Decaffeinated coffee and tea • Limit alcoholic beverages to one (1) per day for women and two (2) per day for men	• Caffeinated coffee and tea • Sodas and bottled drinks • Fruit juices • Excessive alcoholic beverages more than one (1) per day for women and two (2) per day for men
Others 	• Low calorie & low-fat desserts • Angel food cake • Sugar-free gelatin (e.g., JELL-O®) and popsicles • Sugar substitutes (e.g., Equal® Splenda®)	• Soda • Ice cream • Syrup • Jelly • Products containing sugar as a main ingredient • Cakes • Pies • Cookies

Getting the Right Exercise



Always check with your provider before starting any activity.

Heart failure can make you feel tired and less able to exercise. However, staying active helps your heart work better, even if it is weak.

There is no single limit for how much you can exercise with heart failure. The most important thing is to stay safe and listen to your body. Light to moderate exercise, such as walking or gentle cardio, is usually best.

Aim for 30 minutes of daily activity. Ask your doctor what level of exercise is right for you.

This can include walking, light cardio, or gentle strength exercises such as lifting light weights or using resistance bands.

Exercise guidelines

Follow the following phases to help you reach 30–45 minutes of daily walking.

Phase 1
Start by walking at a comfortable pace for about 5–10 minutes, or as your doctor advises.

Phase 2
Each time you walk, add 1–2 minutes as you are able. You can also do shorter bursts of activity several times a day.

Phase 3
Work up to 30–45 minutes of walking per day. Take rest breaks as needed.

It does not matter if you exercise all at once or in shorter sessions. For example, three 10-minute walks or six (6) 5-minute walks are just as helpful.

The total amount of time you move each day is what counts.

Notes

Notes

Notes

