

Learning to Live with Heart Failure

You can do it! You can make changes in your life to help you feel better and stay healthy. This resource gives you tips for daily life and answers common questions.

Conserve your energy

- Rest at least 1 hour every day.
- Aim for balance.
 - Balance activity with rest.
 - Balance hard activities with easy activities.
 - Do activities when you feel your best.
- Plan ahead.
 - Plan your chores and daily activities ahead of time.
 - Space them out throughout the day and week. You do not have to do everything in one day.
 - Whenever you can, sit to work or do daily chores.
 - Keep things you use the most within reach.
 - Prepare bigger meals and freeze portions to save preparing meals another day.
- Use things that help conserve energy.
 - Choose clothes that have zippers instead of buttons. Make sure the zipper is in the front and not the back.
 - Use long-handled tools to make reaching easier.
 - If needed, use a walker, shower chair, and bedside toilet.
 - Choose light weight house hold or kitchen items. For example, choose aluminum pots and pans instead of cast iron.



- Avoid things that drain energy, such as:
 - Doing chores or activities right after you eat
 - Doing intense physical activity
 - Lifting, stretching, or any other strenuous arm movement
- Ask for help.
 - Ask those you live with to share in doing the daily tasks and household chores.
 - Ask family and friends to help out.

Get enough sleep

- Practice good sleep habits.
 - Have a regular bedtime.
 - Relax before bedtime.
 - If you cannot get to sleep within 30 minutes, get up and read or watch TV.
 - Only use your bed for sleeping and intimacy. This means get out of bed to read or watch TV.
- If you get short of breath lying down, prop yourself up with pillows.
- If you get up often to go to the toilet, talk to your health care provider. Your medications might need adjusting.



Take care of your physical health

- Keep in contact with your health care team.
- Getting sick can be deadly when you have heart failure.
 - Get a flu shot every year.
 - Get a pneumonia shot.

Take care of your emotional health

Many people find it hard to do everything needed to manage their heart failure. If you are feeling stressed, depressed, or unusually worried, the BC Heart Failure website has resources to help you (www.bcheartfailure.ca). Don't hide these feelings. Talk to your health care provider.

Can I drive?

Whether or not you drive depends on how you are feeling. Generally, people can drive as long as their heart failure is under control.

However, the Motor Vehicle Act defines when a person is or is not medically fit to drive. If your health care provider feels your health affects your ability to drive safely, it must be reported to the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles. You might have restrictions on your driver's licence or have your licence removed. It is all about public safety.

Can I work?

It depends on your overall health, how you are managing your heart failure, and the type of work. For some people, working might be helpful, but for others it might not be good. Every person is different. Talk to your health care provider about what is right for you.

If your health care provider says you can work, you might be able to start as soon as your signs of heart failure are under control, or you might have to gradually build up to doing all aspects of the work.



Benefits of working:

- Helps you get into a daily routine
- Helps you feel better and improves your mood
- Lessens money worries by having an income

What about having sex?

Some people worry about whether it is safe to have sex when they have heart failure. Once your signs of heart failure are under control, you should be able to have an active and safe sex life. Human touch and good sexual relations are part of a healthy life.

When you have sex, it can take a lot of energy, both emotionally and physically. The physical energy is like climbing 20 steps in 10 seconds.

Sex should be fun and feel good:

- Wait at least 1 hour after eating.
- Do not drink alcohol before sex.
- Choose a time when you are rested and relaxed.
- Choose a comfortable place where it is not too hot or cold.
- Stop and rest if you get short of breath or feel uncomfortable.
- Find other ways to express love and affection.
- Don't get upset if you are not able to perform as you expected.
- Talk to your partner about how you feel.



Problems are possible. Your interest in sex might drop. You might get short of breath during sex. Men might have problems getting an erection. Problems can be a side effect of a medication or a sign your heart failure is getting worse. Talk to your health care provider about any problems having sex.

Remember there are other ways to express love and affection.

How do I stay on track during special occasions?

Whether eating out or eating in, food for special occasions is more likely to be high in salt, especially sauces and gravies. Also, people tend to eat and drink more.

- Make healthy choices.
 - Choose food prepared with little or no salt.
 - Where possible, choose fresh vegetables and fruit.
- Plan big meals for midday.
- Pay special attention to your snacking and portion size.
- Watch your fluid intake.

A word about...

Drinking alcohol

Some alcohol can be helpful to a normal heart. However, sometimes even a small amount of alcohol can cause heart failure to get worse.

Alcohol can weaken your heart muscle and increase your blood pressure, creating more work for your heart.

Ask your health care team if any amount of alcohol is okay for you.



Smoking

Everyone knows smoking and using tobacco products damages your heart and lungs. But quitting is not easy. Your chances of quitting are much better if you ask for help.

Ask your health care team for:

- Help to quit smoking
- Ways to deal with second-hand smoke

To learn more about quitting smoking, check the website: www.quitnow.ca.



Future heart failure care

Have the conversation with your family and healthcare provider

Heart failure is a condition that is not curable and gets worse over time. In the future, there could be a time when you might be too sick to consent to treatment offered by your healthcare provider or doctor. If this happens, your healthcare provider will look to your family for help with decisions about your care.

Planning now for the future can give you comfort knowing your family and healthcare provider knows what is important to you. It can also ease the stress for your family if they have to make medical decisions for you.

To learn more about this, talk to your health care provider, or family doctor and read the booklet: *'My Voice: Expressing My Wishes for Future Health Care Treatment'* from the BC Ministry of Health (available online at www.seniorsbc.ca).

