



## Receiving care



**Of all the challenges that arise when you have a long-term condition, managing your relationships can be among the most difficult.**

**Some people find that their relationships change when they develop a long-term condition — sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently.**

There can be many reasons for this. The reactions of friends and family to your condition may vary; you may feel smothered by some and ignored by others. Sometimes people close to you may be so upset at your illness, that you spend more time comforting them than they spend supporting you.

What is more, it is likely that most people close to you will know very little about heart failure. As a result, they may not understand the impact that your condition has on your life, and this may drive a wedge between you.

However, people close to you may be able to give you support.

## WITH TREATMENT



Family members or close friends can remind you to take your medicines or attend a doctor appointment with you.

## MAKING LIFESTYLE CHANGES



Maybe a friend or family member can exercise with you and learn about lowering stress. You can pick a healthy, fun, and relaxing activity to do together.

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT



Talking about your condition or feeling may not be easy, but it may help other people understand and want to help.

## WITH EVERYDAY LIFE



Friends and family members might be able to help you with everyday tasks such as food shopping and household chores<sup>1</sup>.

But, it can be very difficult to accept care from others if you feel like a burden, as some people with heart failure do<sup>2</sup>.

So how can you deal with this?





## Managing your caring relationships

As we have seen, there can be great variation in people's responses to your condition. Some may comfort you, some may disappoint you, but in all cases the important fact is that you are the one managing heart failure, and *your needs matter*.

It is usually helpful if the people around you understand your condition. So, if you can share your knowledge of heart failure with those who care for you, this can help them to see things from your perspective and be more effective in supporting you. It may also comfort and reassure them.

So, you could perhaps share your e-mails from this support program with the people who support you, or talk to them about your own experiences.

Don't worry if you find this hard, or if you simply feel unable to do it. You already have a lot to manage, so don't push yourself too hard, emotionally or physically.

Below are some tips that can help you talk with friends and family members about your condition.



- **Talk to the right people.**

Choose close family and friends who you know will support you and understand.

- **Share only what you want to share.**

If someone asks you a question that is too private, it's okay to say that you don't want to talk about it.

- **Know your limits and share them.**

For example, if you plan to go for a walk and you know that you will need to take some breaks along the way, let your friend know before the walk. A good friend will be happy to do what you need.



## External sources of support

At times, people with a long-term condition find it useful to get some — occasionally all — support from sources other than family and friends. If you think that external support might help you, speak to your healthcare team. They will often be able to put you in touch with national or local organisations that support people with heart failure. Your local council or authority, or your local health organisation, may also be able to help.



**Your friends and family might find it very helpful to know more about your condition, and how it affects you. If you feel up to it, why not share the e-mails we have been sending you, with them? If people who support you know more about heart failure, this may make them feel more confident and better able to support you.**

If you happen to have an urgent medical concern, please call your doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call your local Emergency Contact number. Remember, your doctor is your primary source for information on your condition and treatment. Be sure to speak with them if you have any questions or concerns.

### References

1. Imes CC et al. Descriptive study of partners' experiences of living with severe heart failure. *Heart Lung* 2011; 40 (3): 208-16.
2. Ekman I, Ehnfors M, Norberg A. The meaning of living with severe chronic heart failure as narrated by elderly people. *Scand J Caring Sci* 2000; 14 (2): 130-6.