



Self care



You will probably have heard about self care from your doctor, or other members of your healthcare team.

In fact, you may have heard about it several times! This is because self care is really important.

Good self care can make a tremendous difference to your health. It can help you to feel better, keep you out of hospital and allow you to enjoy your best possible quality of life.

You may be wondering what good self care actually looks like, and what you have to do to achieve it. Well, you will be off to a very good start if you can:

- Remember to take your medicines and follow your treatment plan
- Eat less salt and salty foods^{1a}
- Be active, as appropriate and with guidance from your healthcare team^{1b}
- Stop smoking^{2a}
- Avoid or limit alcohol^{2a}
- Eat a healthy diet and maintain a healthy weight^{2a}
- Track and keep a record of your symptoms and health



Of course, you must also follow your treatment regime, as set out by your healthcare team. That means, for example, taking your medicines at the times, and in the ways, directed.



Monitoring

It is advisable to monitor your own health and symptoms. Your healthcare team will probably ask you to do some or all of the following:

THE IMPORTANCE OF WEIGHING YOURSELF

You may be asked to weigh yourself at least once a day, and to record your weight. This is because changes in weight can be a sign of changes in your heart health, for example, you may be retaining too much liquid. This why its always important to report such changes to your healthcare team. It is also helpful if you can maintain a healthy weight because this makes it easier for your heart to work, and can relieve some symptoms.



CONTROLLING YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure is not good for your heart — it also makes it worse. If you have high blood pressure, this will put extra strain on your heart, so your doctor will want you to keep your blood pressure at a healthy level. You may be asked to monitor your own blood pressure, and your healthcare team is likely to measure it regularly.



WATCH YOUR FLUID INTAKE



If your body has to deal with a lot of fluid, this can put a strain on your heart. Some people with heart failure are asked to keep their fluid intake within certain levels, although many are not. However, even if your doctor does not ask you to restrict your fluids, people with heart failure should avoid taking excess fluids, so don't drink large amounts all at once. It's a good idea to aim for about 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid daily, taken in small amounts throughout the day.

CUT DOWN ON SALT

The human body needs salt, but the amount of salt we eat nowadays is usually far more than we need. Too much salt can make your body hold on to water, and raise your blood pressure. This can make symptoms, such as swelling and breathing problems, much worse. Your doctor will probably ask you to monitor and limit your salt intake, usually to between 1,500mg and 2,000mg each day.

This can be a challenge — many foods contain salt, including foods that you would not expect to find salt in at all! But with a bit of imagination and practice, you can still eat well and enjoy your food. Your healthcare team, and this program, can help you.



LIMIT OR CUT OUT ALCOHOL, STOP SMOKING

Alcohol is bad for your heart; it damages muscles and cells. Smoking is extremely bad for your health and makes heart failure worse. The best thing is for you to quit both: your healthcare team can support you with this, and can put you in touch with experts who can help you to live a much healthier lifestyle.

MONITOR YOUR SYMPTOMS

You will also be asked to monitor your symptoms. This is because (a) you can then discuss them with your healthcare team, who may be able to help you manage symptoms and (b) changes in symptoms, or the appearance of new symptoms, can signal changes in your heart health.



Treatment for heart failure can affect many parts of your body and your mind, so there are lots of things to watch out for. For example, heart failure and its treatment can affect your weight, blood pressure, fluid retention, sleep, mood and ability to exercise. You may want to talk about symptoms with a member of your healthcare team, so that you have an idea of what to expect.



What not to do

As with all chronic health conditions, some things are likely to make people with heart failure feel much worse. For example:

- **Never ignore new or changed symptoms.** Always report these to your healthcare team. This applies to all symptoms, including your weight and mood.
- **Do not change the way you take your medicines**, or any other aspect of your treatment, unless your doctor has clearly said that it is OK.
- **Try not to change your activity levels**, or take up a new form of exercise, without having discussed it with a healthcare professional.
- **Never take any over the counter medicines or health/food supplements**, until a healthcare professional has agreed that it is a good idea.
- Perhaps the most important rule is this one:
Do not hesitate to talk to a member or members of your healthcare team about your heart failure, or about anything that concerns you.

Developing good communication with your healthcare team will give you a great advantage in managing your heart failure. So **do** make sure they are aware of everything that affects your health, and **do** ask them about any aspect of your care or treatment that concerns you. They can also give you great advice on living a healthy lifestyle and achieving specific goals, like losing weight or giving up smoking.



Using a diary is a great way to keep track of your symptoms and communicate them to your healthcare team or anybody who looks after you. It contains a wealth of information about you, your health and your symptoms.

When care professionals read your diary, they get a full and rounded picture of your situation and your treatment, and that helps them to provide the care that is best for 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

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