Heart Failure:
Patient Information
What is heart failure?

Heart failure is a condition in which the heart muscle has become weaker than normal and is no longer able to pump blood as easily throughout the body. Patients with heart failure need to take specific steps to preserve their heart function.

At St Charles Health System, our goal is for all patients to live a high quality life, with as few hospital visits as possible. The purpose of this packet is to share our knowledge on how to best manage heart failure.
How do I know if I have heart failure?

Your doctor will order tests to determine your diagnosis. The most common test is an ultrasound or echocardiogram (echo) of your heart. The echo gives the doctor information on the strength of each heart beat. This is called the ejection fraction. An ejection fraction is a measure of how much blood is being pumped out of the heart to the body.

What is heart failure and how you know if you have it?
What should I know about my heart failure?

Your ejection fraction is measured in percent. A normal ejection fraction is 55 to 70 percent. If this is your ejection fraction, it can mean that your heart is pumping enough blood to feed your body the oxygen and nutrients it needs. It also means that your body is pumping enough blood to move waste and fluids out of the body for excretion. A below normal ejection fraction can mean that you are not moving fluids and waste out of your body as well as you could. It also means that you are not able to feed your tissues oxygen and nutrients.
How do you feel during ordinary physical activity?

Doctors also classify heart failure according to how many symptoms you have during activity. This classification comes from the New York Heart Association Functional Classification. It is a good idea to know not only your current ejection fraction, but also the class heart failure you are in. The progression of your heart failure can be minimized and tracking your ejection fraction and class gives your health care provider an idea of how well they and you are doing in minimizing the progression of your heart failure.

CLASS

I  - No symptoms and no limitation in activity
II - Mild symptoms and some limitation during
III - Obvious limitation in activity. Comfortable at rest
IV - Severe limitation, with symptoms while at rest

What you should know about your heart failure.
How do I manage my heart failure?

The following steps can help you take control of your heart failure and improve the quality of your life.

1. **Step one:** Take your medications as prescribed.

   The medications prescribed for heart failure help the heart muscle pump more efficiently. They also help move fluids through the body more effectively and lower your blood pressure.

2. **Step two:** Weigh yourself everyday and write it down.

   It is important to weigh yourself at the same time every morning when you get up - without clothes and after emptying your bladder. An increase of three pounds over one to three days will tell you that fluid could be building up in your body. This build up could be anywhere in the body, but tends to take place in the hands, feet and lungs. If you experience weight gain, report it to your doctor.
Step three: Avoid sodium or salt.

Salt________mg.  Fluid________________

Wherever sodium goes, water follows. When you eat sodium your body absorbs more fluids (retention). Sodium is measured in milligrams (mg). Your doctor will let you know the maximum amount of sodium you should have per day. It is very important to read all food labels for the amount of sodium. One meal with too much sodium could result in enough fluid retention to cause breathing difficulties and the need for hospitalization.
Step four: Get active.

__________ min.

It is important to exercise regularly. Your doctor will let you know how much exercise to start with and then how quickly you can increase your activity. Exercise can increase your energy and decrease fatigue. Regular exercise improves your overall quality of life and improves the health of your heart. Ask your doctor how you may benefit from a Cardiac Rehabilitation Program.
**Step five:** Don’t smoke.

If you don’t smoke, don’t start! If you do smoke, quitting is critical to preserving your heart. Smoking damages the lungs and heart tissue which worsens the symptoms of heart failure. Smoking results in increased blood pressure and harms the small blood vessels of the heart. Quitting can be very difficult and we offer many resources to help. Ask your health care provider about smoking cessation classes or medication that can help you achieve success.

**Step six:** Make and keep all follow-up appointments.

Physician: _________________________   Phone:  _____________________

Physician: _________________________   Phone:  _____________________

Physician: _________________________   Phone:  _____________________

Physician: _________________________   Phone:  _____________________

Managing heart failure: **Steps 4-6**
Step seven: Know if your heart failure is worsening.

You can avoid worsening symptoms by following the prescribed routine from your doctor. At times, you may experience new or worsening signs and symptoms of heart failure. These are an indication that you need to see your doctor. A few of these signs include:

- Shortness of breath with activity or at rest. It may get worse when lying flat in bed.
- Leg/ankle and hand swelling
- Weight gain of 2 or more pounds in a day or 3-5 pounds in a week
- Dizziness
- Constant cough
- Belly fullness or bloating
- Decrease in appetite

Call 911 for any emergency, such as chest pain or pressure, shortness of breath that is extreme or bleeding that will not stop.

Most of these symptoms are due to extra fluid in the lungs or body. When you have too much fluid in your body it can also mean your veins have too much fluid which stretches the heart muscle. Just like the elastic band on your pants, if you stretch your heart too often the elastic will wear out, and the muscle will no longer pump blood effectively.

The best indication that your heart failure is stable is having your classification stay the same at your yearly echo. It is then that you will be able to track the rewards of your hard work.
EVERY DAY: Monitor yourself every day

- Weigh yourself in the morning before breakfast (after urinating and wearing similar clothing). Use the same scale each day. Place scale on hard surface (not a rug or carpet). Write it down and compare it to yesterday’s weight and your weight a week ago.
- Take your medicine as prescribed
- Check for swelling in your feet, ankles, legs and stomach

GREEN ZONE: All Clear - this zone is your goal

Your symptoms are under control. You have:

- No shortness of breath
- No weight gain of more 2 pounds compared to yesterday or 3-5 pounds compared to a week ago
- No swelling of your feet ankles, legs or stomach

YELLOW ZONE: CAUTION - This zone is a warning

Call your Doctor’s office right away. Tell them you have Heart Failure. Ask to speak to your doctor or nurse if you have any of the following:

- Weight gain of 2 or more pounds in a day or 3-5 pounds in a week
- Shortness of breath
- Swelling of your feet, ankles, legs or stomach
- Feeling more tired or less energy; dizziness
- Feel uneasy or that something is just not right
- It is harder to sleep lying down.

Calling your doctor’s office and reporting these warning signs can help keep you out of the hospital. Often the doctor or nurse can help you adjust your medicine or suggest other ideas that can get you back on track.

RED ZONE: EMERGENCY Go to the emergency room or call 911 if you have any of the following:

- Struggling to breathe. Unrelieved shortness of breath while sitting still
- Chest pain or pressure
- If you have an Internal Cardioverter Defibrillator (ICD), and you are shocked more than twice, call 911

Managing heart failure: Step7. Know your ZONE. EMERGENCY.