



*Better
Together*

Patient information
Heart Failure Booklet
Cardiology Directorate

When to seek help

Symptoms stable

- You are no more short of breath than is usual.
- There is no weight gain.
- Ankles / legs no more swollen than usual.
- No increase in lethargy.

Heart Failure is stable - ensure you are following appropriate lifestyle advice and are taking your medication as prescribed.

Deteriorating symptoms

- You are more short of breath than usual, particularly when lying flat.
- You wake at night due to breathlessness.
- You can't walk as far as usual due to shortness of breath.
- Weight gain 2-3lbs per day or 5lbs or more in one week.
- Ankles / legs are more swollen than usual
- Increasing lethargy.
- New or worsening cough - particularly if producing frothy white phlegm/sputum.

**Contact your Heart Failure Nurse
Name.....**

**Royal Liverpool University Hospital
Tel: 0151 706 3274**

**Community Tel: 0151 207 7091
Or family doctor (GP)**

Markedly deteriorating symptoms

- You are newly breathless at rest (e.g. cannot complete sentence due to shortness of breath).
- You are waking at night very short of breath; this does not settle when you sit up.
- Your legs / tummy are much more swollen than normal.
- Marked weight gain.

Come to hospital.

Heart Failure

How the heart works

The heart is a muscular pump which pumps blood around the body. In fact, it is really two pumps that work side by side:

- The right side receives blood from the body and pumps it to the lungs where the blood is filled with oxygen.
- The left side receives blood, rich with oxygen, from the lungs and pumps it back around the body to the muscles and organs.

What is heart failure?

Heart failure is one of the most common heart problems. Although the term 'heart failure' sounds alarming, it simply means that the heart is not pumping as effectively as it should. This is a long term condition.

What causes heart failure?

- A heart attack/angina.
- High blood pressure.
- Faulty heart valves.
- A viral heart infection.
- Drinking too much alcohol.
- Unknown causes.

Because water collects in your lungs, you will feel even more short of breath.

Other symptoms of heart failure

- Difficulty breathing, especially on exertion, for example, when you are exercising or doing housework.
- Difficulty breathing when lying down.
- Waking up breathless at night.
- A frequent dry 'hacking cough', especially when you are lying down.
- Tiredness and weakness, especially when you are exercising and unable to undertake usual exercise/activities.
- Swollen feet, ankles or legs and perhaps a swollen stomach.

What can you do to help yourself?

You should seek advice from your doctor or nurse if:

- Your shortness of breath gets worse.
- You have a cough, particularly at night.
- You gain weight unexpectedly.
- Your feet, ankles, legs or stomach swell more.

Watch your weight

- Weigh yourself each morning after going to the toilet.
- You must tell your doctor or nurse if your weight increases
 - by more than two or three pounds
 - (One kilogram) in two days or five to six pounds
 - (Two to three kilograms) within a week.

NB: This is when you haven't changed your eating/exercise pattern.

Salt

- We all need a certain amount of salt (sodium) in our bodies. However, too much salt or water can upset the balance. If you suffer from heart failure it is important that you cut down on salt as it actually causes your body to hold on to fluid.
- When you are cooking, taste food before you add salt as you may not need to add it.
- Try not to add salt at the table.
- Instead, flavour food with pepper, herbs, spices or lemon juice.

Avoid processed foods, which tend to be high in salt: the following foods are examples of those which are high in salt

- Processed meats and bacon
- Tinned and packet soups
- Tinned vegetables
- Most 'fast foods'
- Crisps and peanuts
- Bottled sauces, for example, tomato ketchup
- Chinese food
- Bovril, beef tea and Oxo.

NB: Lo-salt or salt substitutes are not recommended, partly because they may affect your medication for heart failure.

Fluid intake

- You may be asked to monitor your fluid intake but your doctor will discuss this with you if necessary. However try not to exceed three to four pints / 1½ to 2 litres of fluid in a total of 24 hours unless it's very hot weather.

Exercise

- It is important to be as active as possible. If you are not active you will gradually feel weaker and less able to do things. Try walking, cycling or swimming.
- Build up gradually.
- A safe way of checking that you are not overdoing it is to make sure that you always feel that you can talk while you are exercising. If, during exercise, you find it difficult to talk or you are getting very breathless, slow down a bit.

Alcohol

- Alcohol can make some types of heart failure worse.
- You should have no more than two units a day. If taken with food, for example, one to two glasses of wine, this can be of benefit to people with coronary heart disease.
- A unit of alcohol is half a pint of ordinary beer, a small glass of wine or a single measure of spirit.

Thinking of quitting smoking?

Stopping smoking is the single most important thing you can do to improve your health.

FagEnds can help you to achieve this.

FagEnds provides free advice and practical help for smokers who want to quit.

- At a local venue.
- No waiting lists.
- Phonenumber, one to one or group support.
- Specialist midwife supporting pregnant women and their families.
- Your person's advisor (for 12-17 year olds).
- Support during a hospital stay.
- Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT).
- Advice about Champix and Zyban.

Common questions

I've been to FagEnds before can I come back?

Of course you can and why not bring a friend with you.

I don't want to go to a group

That's fine, let an advisor know this when you call and they will arrange for you to have a one to one session.

We can answer many more questions you may have:

- Will I put on weight?
- What will I do when I usually smoke?
- What if I start smoking again?
- How does NRT work?
- What are Champix and Zyban?
- How else can I relax?
- How much money will I save?
- Is it worth the effort?

For more information call 0800 195 2131 or visit:
www.fagends.org to find your nearest group.

If you are a patient who wants to quit and would like more information call **0151 706 2332** or ask a member of staff.

During your stay in hospital a **stop smoking advisor** is available to come and discuss, advise and offer support, including Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

You can do it, we can help.

Medicines

- Take your medicines regularly, as prescribed by your doctor (you will be on medication for the rest of your life).
- Make sure you never run out of your tablets.
- Do not take medication that you can buy from the pharmacist without checking with your healthcare professional first.
- You will be given information about how the tablets you take are helping you.

Immunisations

- People with heart failure can quickly become unwell with flu or pneumonia. It is important that you ask your doctor or nurse for the appropriate immunizations. Every autumn you should ask your GP for your free flu jab.

Diuretics (Water Tablets)

'Diuretics' is the name given to a group of medicines.

Your diuretic is called:

Why has my doctor given me a diuretic?

Diuretics can be used to treat many different conditions, for example, water retention, high blood pressure or heart failure.

Check with your doctor if you are still not sure why you have been prescribed a diuretic.

How do they work?

Diuretics remove excess water from the body so you may find that you have to go to the toilet more often to pass water. By removing excess water they can reduce your blood pressure.

They can help to reduce symptoms of heart failure by removing fluid from the lungs, making breathing easier and reducing swelling of the ankles.

How should I take my diuretic?

Always follow the instructions on the label. You should usually take these medicines in the morning.

If you have been asked to take them twice a day, take the second dose early in the afternoon. Do not take them at night otherwise you may have to wake up to go to the toilet.

Don't alter the amount of fluid that you normally drink while you are taking this medicine (a normal amount is 2½ to 3½ pints a day or 1½ to 2 litres a day) unless advised by your doctor.

What are the side effects of diuretics?

All drugs have side effects. Not everyone will experience them.

Some people may experience:

- Feeling sick.
- Dizziness.
- A rash.
- Muscle cramps.

With all diuretics your doctor will want to do regular blood tests and may change the dose or type of medication depending on the result.

Some diuretics can remove too much potassium (a substance) from your body; this will also be checked with a blood test. If this happens to you, your doctor may change your diuretic to one that stops you losing potassium or may give you potassium tablets.

Diuretics may interfere with your blood sugar levels. This may be more apparent if you have diabetes. Take extra care to check the sugar levels in your blood or urine and if your sugar levels are higher than usual, see your doctor as soon as you can.

Can I take other medicines while taking diuretics?

Some other medicines may affect how diuretics work. It is important that you check with your doctor or pharmacist before you take any other medicines, including ones that you buy. Avoid buying salt substitutes such as Lo-salt or Ruthmol.

Beta-blockers

'Beta-blockers' is the name given to a group of medicines.

Your beta-blocker is called:

Why has my doctor given me a beta-blocker?

Beta-blockers can be used to treat a weak heart (known as heart failure), but they also have other uses.

Check with your doctor if you are still not sure why you have been prescribed a beta-blocker.

How do they work?

Beta-blockers reduce the amount of work your heart has to do by slowing the heart rate. You will be given a small dose first which will be gradually increased.

How should I take my beta-blocker?

Always follow the instructions on the label. Do not stop taking this medicine unless your doctor tells you to.

For the first few weeks of the treatment you may feel worse before you begin to feel better.

What are the side effects of beta-blockers?

All drugs have side effects. Not everybody will experience side effects.

Some people may experience the following:

- If you have asthma, some beta-blockers can make your asthma worse. If you have asthma or become more breathless, check with your doctor that it is safe for you to continue taking your beta-blocker.
- Some beta-blockers can cause, or worsen, cold fingers and toes. See your doctor if this happens. This is especially important if you have diabetes.
- Some beta-blockers can affect diabetes. If you have diabetes it is important that you take extra care to measure your sugar levels because beta-blockers can
 - make your blood sugar higher than usual
 - reduce the feelings you get when your sugar levels are too low, so you may not notice the beginning of a hypoglycaemic attack.

Other side effects can include extreme tiredness, difficulty sleeping and, rarely, male impotence. If you notice any of these problems, discuss them with your doctor.

Can I take other medicines while taking beta-blockers?

Some other medicines may affect how beta-blockers work. It is important that you check with your doctor or pharmacist before you take any other medicines, including ones that you buy.

Ace Inhibitors

'Ace inhibitors' is the name given to a group of medicines.

Your ACE inhibitor is called:

Why has my doctor given me an ACE inhibitor?

ACE inhibitors are used to treat high blood pressure and heart failure. They can be used after a heart attack. They can reduce the risk of further heart disease and are also prescribed for some people who have diabetes.

Check with your doctor if you are still not sure why you have been prescribed an ACE inhibitor.

How do they work?

These drugs make the blood vessels relax, reducing blood pressure and the work the heart has to do. They stop a substance called ACE (Angiotensin Converting Enzyme) from working.

How should I take my ACE inhibitor?

The dose you need to take depends on which drug you are taking and your symptoms.

Sometimes, you will be given a small dose first (usually at night) and then the dose will be gradually increased. Always follow the instructions on the label. Do not stop taking this medicine unless your doctor tells you to.

What are the side effects of ACE inhibitors?

All drugs have side effects. Not everybody will experience side effects.

Some people may experience:

- A loss of taste.
- Sleep disturbance.
- A dry cough.
- Dizziness or headaches.

If you notice any of these problems, discuss them with your doctor.

If you experience any of the following effects, stop taking this medicine and tell your doctor immediately.

These side effects are rare:

- Skin rashes.
- Swollen face or mouth.

From time to time a blood test will be taken (especially if you are also taking water tablets) to check your kidney function.

This blood test will usually take place before and after starting the medication or after a dose increase, and then at regular intervals at least once a year. It is important that you attend for this test when requested.

Can I take other medicines while taking ACE inhibitors?

Some other medicines may affect how ACE inhibitors work. It is important that you check with your doctor or pharmacist before you take any other medicines, including ones that you buy.

Reduce the amount of salt you use, try to only use a small amount in cooking and at the table.

Avoid salt substitutes, such as Lo-salt and Ruthmol and avoid preparations which may contain potassium, e.g. cystitis preparations, as potassium may be affected by ACE inhibitors.

Spirolactone

You have been given a medicine called spironolactone.

Why has my doctor given me spironolactone?

Spirolactone is used to treat a weak heart (known as heart failure). It is a type of diuretic (water tablet).

Check with your doctor if you are still not sure why you have been prescribed spironolactone.

How does it work?

Spirolactone makes the body retain less fluid. This relieves swollen ankles and breathlessness.

How should I take my Spironolactone?

Always follow the instructions on the label. Do not stop taking this medicine unless your doctor tells you to. You should take spironolactone at the same time each day.

What are the side effects of Spironolactone?

All drugs have side effects. Not everybody will experience side effects.

Some people may experience:

- Feeling sick.
- Headaches.
- Some men may suffer from swollen or tender breasts.
- Spironolactone can increase the amount of potassium (a substance) in your body. Your doctor can check this with blood tests. If this happens, your doctor may stop it. Before you start taking spironolactone, your doctor will want to check your kidney function by taking a blood sample. This will be repeated regularly when you are on this medicine. It is important that you attend for this test when requested.

Can I take other medicines while taking Spironolactone?

Some other medicines may affect how spironolactone works.

It is important that you check with your doctor or pharmacist before you take any other medicines, including ones that you buy.

You should reduce the amount of salt you use in cooking and at the table. Avoid salt substitutes, such as Lo-salt and Ruthmol.

Avoid preparations which may contain potassium, e.g. cystitis preparations.

This leaflet is not a substitute for any advice that your doctor, nurse or pharmacist may give you. You can get more detailed information from the manufacturer's information leaflet.

What should I do if I miss a dose of my medication?

Take it as soon as you remember. If it is nearly time for the next dose, do not take the one you missed. Take the next dose at the usual time. Do not double the next dose

Weight Chart for patients with a diagnosis of chronic heart failure

If you have heart failure it is important to keep an eye on your weight because, if it goes up, your body may be building up to much fluid.

Weigh yourself every morning

- After going to the toilet.
- Before getting dressed.
- Before Breakfast.

If your weight starts to go up quickly, and you have put on more than two pounds (1kg) on any day and another two pounds (1kg) the next day it is important to seek medical advice from your family doctor (GP) or your heart failure nurse as soon as possible.

In addition you should seek advice if you notice any of the following:

- Increased breathlessness
- Increased swelling of your ankles

Expert Patient programme

There is a free self-management programme for people living with long term health conditions. For more information, or to attend a course, please ring:

Liverpool **(0151) 549 1706**

Sefton **(01704) 885 340**

Knowsley **(0151) 443 4441**

NHS Direct: 0845 46 47

For free advice and information on any health matter, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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