

CHRONIC CARE

# Heart Failure

## Caring for a Loved One With Heart Failure

CAREGIVER'S GUIDE

**Interim**  
HEALTHCARE®  
First in Home Care.®



Home Health and  
Personal Care

## **Heart failure is a serious diagnosis ... but YOU can make a significant difference.**

When a loved one is diagnosed with heart failure, it impacts every facet of their life. They will need to make some decisive changes in the way they live, eat and care for their body to gain control of their health and prevent greater problems.

As their caregiver, you can be a real source of encouragement and accountability as they implement the changes required to care for their disease. Our Heart Failure Caregiver's Guide is designed to educate family members about heart failure and the crucial role that diet, exercise, rest and medication play in the care process. With a deeper understanding of their disease and the care protocols they must follow to manage it, you will be equipped to support them as they move toward successful self-care.

At Interim HealthCare®, we understand the difficulties that individuals with heart failure face and the significant difference that caregivers make. As you support your loved one in their health journey, we'll be here to support you.



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***“One in five people will develop heart failure in their lifetime.”***

## The Reality of Heart Failure

Currently, more than six million people in the U.S. have heart failure and one in five people will develop it in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, the name heart failure does not actually mean the heart has failed; it means that the heart cannot pump as it should and is unable to meet the needs of the body for oxygen and blood circulation. If not managed properly, heart failure can lead to life-threatening problems, so we want to help you help your loved one make the necessary changes to prevent them.

### Understanding Ejection Fraction

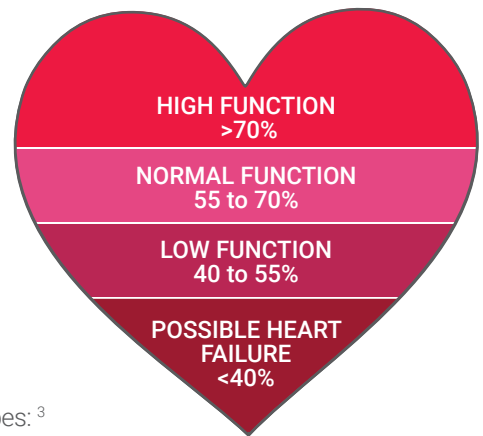
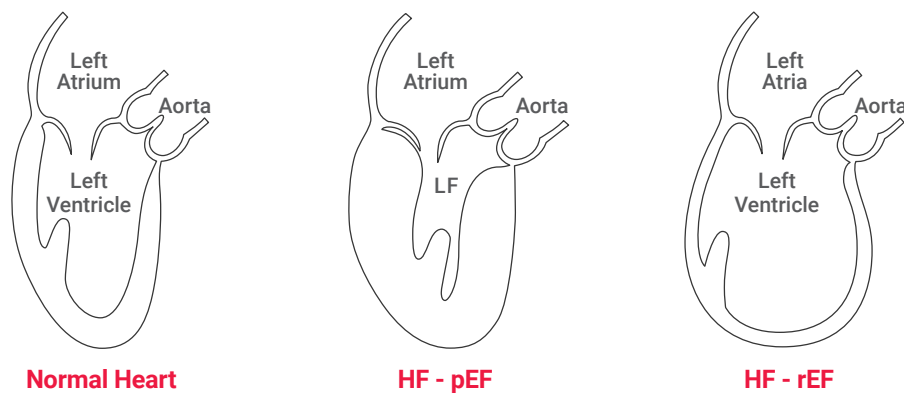
To understand heart failure, you must understand how it is measured, diagnosed and tracked. Ejection Fraction (EF) measures how much blood the left ventricle pumps out each time it contracts. Expressed as a percentage, an EF of 60 percent means that 60 percent of the total amount of blood in the left ventricle is pushed out with each heartbeat.<sup>2</sup> If your loved one has been diagnosed with heart failure, their EF will inform their physician how severe their condition is and provide a benchmark for tracking it.

### Two Types of Heart Failure

While there are many different causes for heart failure, there are two main types:<sup>3</sup>

- **Heart Failure with Reduced Ejection Fraction (HF-rEF)** – The heart gets larger, reducing its ability to contract and pump the correct amount of oxygen-rich blood to the body.
- **Heart Failure with Preserved Ejection Fraction (HF-pEF)** – The heart chambers become thick and stiff, preventing it from filling up, causing less blood to be pumped out to the body.

A normal heart muscle contracts and relaxes, pushing blood throughout the body, which supplies oxygen to the body through the blood.



### Increased Health Risks

If a family member has been diagnosed with heart failure, they are at an increased risk of other health complications, such as:<sup>4</sup>

- Heart valve issues
- Heart rhythm problems
- Kidney damage or failure
- Liver damage

Source: <sup>1</sup> [www.us.KeepItPumping.com](http://www.us.KeepItPumping.com) <sup>2</sup> <https://www.heart.org> <sup>3</sup> <https://my.clevelandclinic.org> <sup>4</sup> [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)

### Lifestyle Changes It Requires

If a family member has been diagnosed with heart failure, it's time to make some changes. The biggest change comes in the form of diet choices. It's crucial that they move to a low-sodium diet to minimize fluid retention and take the pressure off of their heart. Their physician may order fluid restrictions if they are experiencing problems with weight gain and swelling. While eating habits and fluid intake may be hard to change, it is absolutely necessary for your loved one to manage their condition.

Following their prescribed medication regimen will become a regular part of their daily schedule, along with weighing and documenting daily weights, which may require medication adjustments. Planning time for rest to conserve energy for daily tasks is also important and can help reduce stress. Finally, staying active with exercises approved by their doctor and maintaining a healthy weight will help strengthen their heart. And, if your loved one smokes, they must quit to prevent serious health complications.

As a caregiver, these are all areas where you can come alongside your loved one and assist. Granted, they will not be easy changes, but with your support, they can begin to turn things around and live a healthier life.

### Partnering With Their Physician

With heart failure, it's really important to stay on track with the plan of care their physician has prescribed. As their caregiver, you can be instrumental in helping them do so by ensuring they keep all of their scheduled appointments and come prepared with the information their doctor will need. During each visit, their physician will review their medication and dosages, log of daily weights, sodium intake and diet to gauge how well they are managing their condition and make changes as needed. If your loved one is having any issues with compliance to their plan of care, this is the time to discuss it. And, when symptoms such as dizziness, swelling and shortness of breath occur, notify their doctor so they can receive the timely care they need.



## The Important Role Caregivers Play

Caregivers play an integral part in their loved one's ability to manage their heart failure and live a quality life. While the road ahead may be challenging, you can walk it with them, encouraging them when it feels too hard and helping them follow the plan of care prescribed by their physician. From overseeing their care plan and providing reminders to hands-on involvement in daily activities, you can make a real difference in their results.

As their caregiver, they may be looking to you for assistance with:

<b>Low-sodium food choices, meal planning and shopping</b>
<b>Prompting them to take medications at scheduled times</b>
<b>Monitoring and documenting daily weights</b>
<b>Informing their doctor of weight gain so medications can be adjusted</b>
<b>Recognizing and responding to signs of fatigue and shortness of breath</b>
<b>Encouraging daily rest to conserve energy for tasks</b>
<b>Notifying their physician of wheezing or a persistent cough</b>
<b>Examining skin for swelling, breaks or wounds</b>
<b>Elevating their feet when swelling occurs</b>
<b>Ensuring they keep all of their doctor appointments</b>
<b>Helping them understand all the components of self-care</b>

## How We Can Help You

Since 1966, Interim HealthCare has been a reliable source of care and support to individuals living with heart failure. Our Heart Failure Caregiver's Guide is a compilation of education and insights that can help you understand their disease so you can help them learn to manage it.

If your loved one needs extra support managing their condition at home, our healthcare professionals and home care aides can help. Trained in heart failure, our team can help guide them through a proven pathway to successful self-care. And, if the activities of daily living have become too difficult, our aides are able to assist them with bathing, dressing, meals, light housekeeping and transportation. At Interim HealthCare, we understand the challenges that heart failure brings and we're here to support you and your loved one as you take this journey together.

# HomeLife

## ENRICHMENT®



MIND



BODY



SPIRIT



FAMILY

### A Holistic Approach to Heart Failure Care

At Interim HealthCare, we believe in care for the whole individual, not just one part—and it is embedded in every aspect of our care model. Our HomeLife Enrichment® (HLE) standard of care thoughtfully engages the mind, body, spirit and family to ensure an optimal care experience.

Our HLE model gives caregivers a holistic view of heart failure care and how interconnected each aspect of care is to achieving successful outcomes. In this guide, we will explore each part of the care process to give you a clear understanding of what your loved one needs and how best to care for them.

### The End Goal

Helping people with heart failure learn to self-care for their condition is our ultimate goal. While their diagnosis is serious, if they follow the care plan established by their physician, they will begin to see their symptoms improve and their heart failure under control. This guide is packed full of information and tools to help you understand what's required for successful self-care, so you can help your loved one manage their condition and live a quality life.

Now, let's explore how care for the mind, body, spirit and family can help your loved one reach this goal.





## MIND

*Care for the mind involves insight and understanding about heart failure which leads to actions that produce new habits and positively impact outcomes.*

### Understanding Heart Failure and Its Impact on the Body

Heart failure is a chronic condition that impacts one in five people during their lifetime. Often misunderstood due to its name, it is not failure of the heart, but rather a weakening of the heart that makes it difficult to pump blood the way it should. This causes the heart to work harder which results in a variety of different symptoms that can be debilitating in many ways. Since the heart's function is vital to the health of the whole body, it can create other serious health problems if it is not brought under control. While heart failure cannot be reversed, its symptoms can be significantly improved with the right care, medication and diet. This is where you, as a caregiver, can come alongside your loved one and make a positive impact.

### Heart Failure Symptoms

Heart failure manifests in many different symptoms. As a caregiver, being aware of these symptoms and responding promptly is crucial to the health and well-being of your loved one.



#### Shortness of breath

Your loved one may feel out of breath while inactive, sitting or resting. This is the result of the heart being unable to pump enough blood which causes fluid to leak into their lungs, making it more difficult to breathe. When this occurs, positioning them upright, whether in a chair or bed, with their head propped up will help.



#### Coughing or wheezing

A persistent or nagging cough is another symptom resulting from fluid backing up into their lungs, which may be accompanied by white or pink (blood-tinged) mucus.



#### Swelling in lower extremities

When fluids build up in their tissues due to the heart not moving the blood effectively, they may experience swelling in their feet, ankles, legs and stomach. When this occurs, elevating their feet will provide some relief. Their doctor may also order fluid restriction to help.



#### Confusion

Your loved one may experience temporary episodes of confusion if their brain is not getting the right amount of blood flow needed to process thoughts clearly.



#### Rapid weight gain

When fluids collect in the tissue, they may gain weight quickly. If it results in three or more pounds in a day or five pounds or more in a week, contact their physician. Typically, they will prescribe a diuretic to help pull fluids out of their body.



#### Fatigue

When the heart is not pumping enough blood to meet the needs of the body, it will divert the blood to organs that need the oxygen-rich blood first. This means their arms and legs receive less, causing them to feel exhausted and unable to perform simple tasks. Scheduling regular times of rest will help your loved one conserve energy.

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## Managing Multiple Chronic Diseases

If your loved one is over the age of 65, there's a good chance they are dealing with more than just heart failure. At this stage of life, it's not uncommon for individuals to have multiple chronic diseases that need to be managed simultaneously. For this reason, it is important for them to be under the care of a primary physician and ensure that all of their doctors are in communication about their care, medications and challenges. With multiple conditions, come greater health issues, hospitalizations and oftentimes, depression. If your loved one is battling several chronic diseases, they are probably taking numerous medications to manage them, which can limit their physical abilities to handle everyday tasks. As a caregiver, being by their side to assist them and encourage them to follow their plan of care can make a big difference in the quality of life they live.

## Following Prescribed Medication

Helping your loved one comply with their medication regimen is a vital part of managing the symptoms of heart failure. Their doctor will prescribe medication to help take fluids out of their body, reduce swelling and stop the aging process of the heart to improve its pumping function. As a caregiver, it's important for you and your family member to understand the different medications they will be taking, what each one does and when refills are needed to ensure no dosages are missed.

Diuretics, also known as water pills, are one of the most common medications heart failure patients are prescribed. Essentially, diuretics help the body get rid of excess fluids and sodium through urination, which prevents the heart from working harder. If your loved one has fluid buildup in their lungs, stomach, legs, ankles or feet, diuretics will help reduce swelling by removing fluids from their body. They also may be used to help lower their blood pressure.<sup>5</sup>

Weight is another factor in medication regimens. Daily weight changes may require medications to be adjusted, so it's important to keep track of these changes. And, since they may be taking medications for other health issues, knowing how the meds interact and potential side effects is crucial to their care. A pill planner and a daily medication log can help you stay on top of medication schedules and provide a good reference for their physician to review during appointments. See the Daily Heart Failure Care Log in the Appendix for a way to track their medications.

## Monitoring Daily Weight

With heart failure, comes issues with weight gain caused by fluid buildup in your loved one's body. If you notice a sudden increase in their weight, this is indicative of fluid retention that will cause the heart to work even harder. For this reason, individuals with heart failure need to check their weight daily and document it for their physician to review and evaluate. To ensure accuracy, it is best to have them weigh at the same time every day, before eating or drinking, and without clothing. If their daily weight increases by three pounds or more (or five pounds in a week), be sure to notify their doctor so medication adjustments can be made to pull extra fluids out of their body. See the Daily Heart Failure Care Log in the Appendix for a way to track their weight.

## Importance of Limiting Sodium

Limiting sodium in your loved one's diet is essential to managing the symptoms of heart failure. Since sodium, a mineral found in salt, makes the body retain fluid, it causes their heart to work harder. This means their diet and eating habits need to change—and for many, this is one of the most difficult changes to make. As their caregiver, learning what foods support a heart-healthy diet and how to calculate sodium intake to ensure it's within the guidelines ordered by their physician is really important. To support you in this effort, we have provided a Heart-Healthy Shopping List along with guidance for Calculating Sodium in Food in the Appendix of this guide.

Source: <sup>5</sup> <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/heart-attack/treatment-of-a-heart-attack/cardiac-medications>

## Fluid Restrictions

If your loved one is having issues with fluid retention and swelling, their doctor may order fluid restrictions to prevent additional pressure on their heart. If this happens, it is important to monitor and calculate the amount of fluids they are taking in each day. While this may be challenging to do, every type of liquid they take in counts toward their fluid restriction limit, including:

<b>Drinks</b>
<b>Creamers</b>
<b>Ice</b>
<b>Soup</b>
<b>Gelatin</b>
<b>Ice cream/frozen yogurt</b>
<b>Shakes/smoothies</b>
<b>Popsicles</b>
<b>Custard/pudding</b>
<b>Salad dressing</b>
<b>Syrup</b>
<b>Gravy</b>
<b>Nutritional supplements (Ensure/Boost)</b>
<b>Alcohol</b>
<b>Liquid medicine</b>
<b>Melons</b>
<b>Berries</b>
<b>Tomatoes</b>
<b>Cucumbers</b>
<b>Other juicy fruits or veggies</b>



## Documenting Their Condition

To ensure their care plan is achieving the right results, it's important to document various aspects of their care for their physician to review during appointments. Looking at the whole picture will help them determine if the protocol for care is working or if adjustments need to be made to see more improvement. There are three main areas of care that should be documented:

- Daily weight
- Medication
- Sodium intake

In the Appendix, you will find a [Daily Heart Failure Care Log](#) you can use to track your loved one's daily weight, medication and sodium intake. It's also helpful to log symptoms such as shortness of breath, swelling and fatigue, which may reveal patterns or needed changes in their plan of care.

### Barriers to Heart Failure Care

When a family member is diagnosed with heart failure, they must make some tough life changes to manage their symptoms and gain control of their health. Understanding the severity of the situation and the consequences of not making the necessary changes can be very motivating, but it doesn't make it any easier for the individual. Some of the biggest barriers to heart failure care are:

- Unwilling to make necessary health changes
- Resistance to a low-sodium diet and fluid restrictions
- Non-compliance with their medication regimen
- Refusal to quit smoking
- Poor weight management

If your loved one is having difficulty in one of these areas, you can help. While these are some tough changes to make, having someone to support them and make some of the dietary and health changes with them, makes all the difference.

### Equipping Individuals for Self-Care

As a caregiver, you have a special role in helping your loved one along in their health journey toward successful self-care. It begins with understanding each aspect of heart failure care and how they all work together to improve symptoms and provide a healthy path forward. In the next section of this guide, we will explore specific ways they should care for their body based on their diagnosis, ranging from medication, diet and fluids to weight, exercise and rest.



## BODY

*Care for the body involves a combination of diet, medication, exercise and rest. This is a crucial part of managing heart failure and minimizing other serious health risks associated with it.*

### Following the Prescribed Diet

Perhaps the hardest change a person with heart failure must make is to their diet. This is never easy, as most people have formed a lifetime of eating habits, but this is an absolute must if they want to take care of their heart and live a healthy life. The consequences of not making the necessary changes are life-threatening. As their caregiver, you can help them make these changes by learning about a low-sodium diet and planning meals that comply with their physician's orders.

After a heart failure diagnosis, one of the first things their doctor will prescribe is a low-sodium diet to prevent additional stress on their heart, swelling in their legs and feet, and shortness of breath that comes from fluid buildup in their lungs. The American Heart Association recommends no more than 2,000 milligrams of sodium a day for people with heart failure, which is no easy task. It requires a thorough evaluation of the food they are eating and a commitment to making the necessary changes. As their caregiver, here are some things you can do to help:

<b>Learn to read food labels for sodium levels</b>
<b>Pay attention to serving sizes—sodium shown is based on one serving</b>
<b>Be aware of hidden salt already contained in food</b>
<b>Divide amount of prescribed sodium by meals/snacks</b>
<b>Plan out meals that comply with sodium limits</b>
<b>Do not add salt to meals (throw out the salt shaker)</b>
<b>Avoid foods that are processed, frozen or fried</b>
<b>Replace bad foods with good foods and flavoring alternatives</b>
<b>Search low-sodium recipes and build a library of new menu options</b>
<b>When eating out, have food prepared without salt or condiments</b>
<b>Track their daily intake of sodium for all meals and snacks</b>

***“A heart-healthy diet will lower your loved one's sodium intake and improve their symptoms.”***



### High-Sodium Foods to Avoid

- Cheese
- Pork
- Beef
- Bread
- Lunch meats
- Chips
- Crackers
- Canned soup
- Canned vegetables
- Frozen food
- Fried food
- Fast food

### Low-Sodium Foods to Add

- Fresh vegetables
- Fresh fruits
- Brown rice
- Whole grain oatmeal
- Salmon, trout or tuna
- Unsalted nuts/seeds
- Skim milk
- Low-fat yogurt
- Low-fat cheese
- Olive oil

### Flavoring Substitutions

- Pepper
- Garlic
- Cumin
- Oregano
- Red pepper
- Cayenne pepper



### A New Perspective on Food

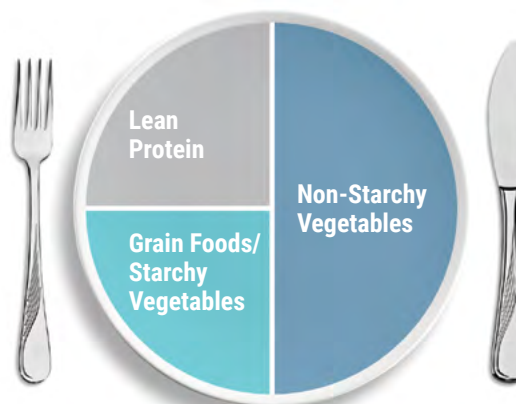
By taking a new approach to food, you can help your loved one lower their sodium intake and see big improvements in their heart failure symptoms. Rather than viewing it as what they can't have, look at the positive side of it. There are many new low-sodium recipes to try that can make mealtimes more inviting. Here are a few websites you can explore that offer heart-healthy recipes:

- [eatingwell.com](http://eatingwell.com)
- [allrecipes.com](http://allrecipes.com)
- [tasteofhome.com](http://tasteofhome.com)

In addition, we've included a [Heart-Healthy Shopping List](#) and guidance for [Calculating Sodium in Food](#) in the Appendix.

### The Plate Method

As you plan for heart-healthy meals, the "Plate Method" can be a great visual tool to ensure your loved one is eating the right foods and in the right portions to manage their heart failure. According to the plate method, half of their plate should be comprised of non-starchy vegetables; one quarter of their plate with lean protein; and one quarter of their plate with whole grains and starchy vegetables. If their prescribed diet permits, you can also add fruit and low-fat dairy food on the side. Just factor in their sodium limits and fluid restrictions as you plan meals.



For additional information, see the ["Fill Their Plate With Heart-Healthy Food"](#) guide in the Appendix.

## Complying With Fluid Restrictions

The amount of fluids your loved one consumes has a significant impact on their ability to manage their disease. Since their heart is already struggling with the amount of fluid in their body, fluid restrictions may be necessary to prevent more problems with retention. A healthy individual is advised to drink eight cups of water a day, which is approximately two quarts of fluid. A person diagnosed with heart failure should follow a different set of guidelines as prescribed by their doctor.

Measuring and controlling fluid intake may be difficult at first, but once you get a system that works for your loved one, it will become easier to manage. Here are some helpful tips:

- Know the prescribed amount of fluids
- Determine a method of measurement
- Plan out their fluid intake for each day:
  - Fill a jug with the prescribed amount of fluid each day
  - Deduct from the container as fluids are consumed (drinks, ice, soup, sauce, fruit, etc.)
  - Schedule out drinks for meals each day
- Track fluid intake on a daily log
- Eat low-salt foods to minimize thirst
- Reduce thirst or dry mouth with hard candy, mints or gum

## Fluid Measurement Guide

<b>1 ounce (oz) = 30 mls (milliliter) = 2 tablespoons</b>
<b>1 cup = 8 oz = 240 mls</b>
<b>4 cups = 32 oz = 1 quart = 960 mls</b>

<b>1000 mls = 1 liter</b>
<b>48 oz = 6 cups = 1 ½ quarts = 1440 mls</b>
<b>64 oz = 8 cups = 2 quarts = ½ gallon = 1920 mls</b>

To assist you, we've included a Daily Heart Failure Care Log in the Appendix which you can use to track their fluid intake each day.

## Tracking Daily Weight

Weighing daily is an important discipline for anyone diagnosed with heart failure, as it is a key indicator of when their body is holding onto extra fluids. It's critical to catch fluid retention when it is still a small amount to prevent hospitalization and serious health complications impacting the kidneys or other vital organs. To do so, their physician will want you to track their daily weight to ensure the medication and diet are working together to achieve their health goals. Here are some basic guidelines for monitoring their weight accurately:

- They should weigh every morning:
  - First thing, same time each day
  - Use the bathroom before weighing
  - Weigh before eating or drinking
  - Weigh without clothing on
- Log their weight on a daily weight log (see Daily Heart Failure Care Log in the Appendix)
- If their weight increases by three pounds or more in a day, or five pounds in a week, contact their physician immediately
  - Most likely, there will be an adjustment in medication (diuretics) to pull extra fluids out of their body
  - A side effect of taking extra diuretics is fatigue and the need to urinate more often; be mindful of this as they plan for their day

Source: <sup>6,7</sup> <https://www.healthgrades.com/right-care/heart-failure/managing-swelling-caused-by-heart-failure>



## Swelling in the Body

Swelling, also known as edema, occurs when excess fluids collect in the body's tissues. This is common in heart failure patients because their heart's pumping function is not as strong and their circulatory system is less efficient. As a result, fluids that would normally be moved along by their blood remain in their body, mainly in their lower extremities. In addition, their kidneys are not able to remove all the sodium from their blood which causes fluid retention and swelling in their legs, ankles, feet and sometimes their abdomen.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, fluid will also build up in their lungs, causing shortness of breath. This is how rapid weight gain occurs in those with heart failure and why their weight must be monitored closely.

## Elevating Swollen Feet and Legs

If you notice your loved one's legs, ankles or feet beginning to swell, the best thing to do is elevate their feet and let gravity do its work. By elevating their feet, the fluid that has collected in their tissues will begin to flow back through their veins to their heart naturally.<sup>7</sup> If the swelling is significant (which can be measured in weight gain of three pounds or more), notify their physician so they can evaluate their condition and prescribe medication to help rid their body of excess fluid. Their physician may order compression hose to be worn for a specified number of hours per day to help decrease swelling and promote circulation. If so, be sure your loved one puts them on correctly and smoothly to receive the proper benefit.

## Shortness of Breath

Fluid buildup in the lungs caused by the heart's weakened pumping function can cause your loved one to experience shortness of breath. If they are unable to take a deep breath or get enough air into their lungs to breathe easily, there are several things you can do to help:

- Position them upright in a chair or bed to help ease the flow of oxygen
- During sleeping hours, keep their head propped up with pillows or with an elevated bed
- Use prescribed oxygen when blood oxygen level deems it appropriate
- Contact their physician about any medications they may need
- Try breathing exercises (approved by their doctor) to help open their lungs
- Regular exercise (approved by their doctor) can strengthen their lungs and heart

## It's Time to Quit Smoking

If your loved one is a smoker, quitting is no longer an option, it is an absolute must! Smoking is not only a major cause of cardiovascular disease (CVD), it causes one in four deaths from it, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In every way, smoking is bad for their health and will cause their heart failure symptoms to worsen. Some of the effects smoking has on their body include:<sup>8</sup>

- Increases triglycerides (fat in their blood)
- Decreases "good" cholesterol, known as high-density lipoproteins (HDL)
- Causes blood to clot easier, blocking blood flow to the heart and brain
- Damages the cells that line their blood vessels
- Produces a buildup of plaque (fat, cholesterol, calcium) in their blood vessels
- Results in the thickening and narrowing of blood vessels



Source:<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/diseases/heart-disease-stroke.html>

## Caregiver Tips to Help Them Quit

It's never easy to stop smoking, but if there was ever a strong motivation to quit, it's heart failure. As their caregiver, you can support your loved one in this effort by providing encouragement during difficult times and redirecting their focus when the urge to smoke comes. Here are a handful of tips that can help:

- Talk to your loved one about the consequences of not quitting; it must be a decision of their will
- Discuss options such as medication, nicotine patches or nicotine gum with their physician
- Be intentional about quitting: set a date, time and action plan
- Decide how to shift their focus when the urge comes
- Stay away from situations that make them want to smoke
- Join a local support group through the American Lung Association
- Get rid of all cigarettes, lighters and matches
- Stay away from others who are smoking or situations that stimulate the desire
- Find something positive to replace smoking with (exercising, learning, reading, walking)
- Stay hydrated, but steer clear of caffeine and alcohol, as they can be a trigger
- Focus on the goal: Less stress on the heart means a healthier life

## Adding Exercise to Their Day

A diagnosis of heart failure does not mean your loved one should cease from physical activity. Quite the contrary, a regular exercise regimen can strengthen their body and improve their heart health while helping them lose excess weight. Talk to their physician about the timing and types of exercise that would be beneficial to them, then put a plan in place to help them make positive steps toward better health. While exercise does not need to be excessive, it should be a part of their daily routine.

Regular exercise benefits a person with heart failure on many different levels, including:<sup>9</sup>

- Reduces heart disease risk factors
- Lessens their chance for future heart problems
- Makes their heart and cardiovascular system stronger
- Improves their body's circulation
- Enables their body to utilize oxygen better
- Boosts their energy level to perform daily tasks
- Reduces fatigue and shortness of breath while active
- Enhances muscle tone and strength
- Improves joint flexibility and balance



Tracking daily exercise can help your loved one stay on course. We've included a Daily Heart Failure Care Log in the Appendix you can use to do so.

Source:<sup>9</sup> <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/departments/heart/patient-education/recovery-care/heart-failure/exercise-activity>

## Start Slowly and Build Up

It's best to begin exercising slowly and gradually build their stamina as their body acclimates to it. Health experts suggest aiming for 21 minutes of exercise a day<sup>10</sup> and gently increasing their activity over time. If this is too much at first, break it up into two increments. The goal is to get them moving at a safe pace that will benefit their health. Of course, all exercises should be approved by their doctor before they begin. It's also a good idea to have an exercise plan in place so they know what to anticipate each day and are looking forward to it. If you are able to exercise along with them, it will help motivate them to keep going. Here are some simple exercises you can start with:



Walking



Cycling



Stretching



Yoga



Swimming



Water aerobics

## Staying on Track With Medication

While it may seem simple, staying organized and on top of medication regimens is crucial to your loved one's ability to fight their disease and live a quality life. Here are some ways you can help:

- Ensure they are taking the right medication at the right time
- Manage changes to medication and adjustments to dosages
- Communicate side effects to their physician
- Get refills before medication runs out

Oftentimes, people with heart failure are on many different types of medication, from diuretics to blood pressure meds and everything in between. If they are battling more than one health condition, it's important to make sure all of their doctors know what they are taking and that there are not any bad drug interactions. As their caregiver, it's helpful to document their daily medication intake; note any side effects or responses that may merit changes; and collaborate with their care team to ensure all medication is working toward their health goals.

We have included a [Daily Heart Failure Care Log](#) in the Appendix to help you start tracking their medication. A pill box and a medication reminder app can also help you stay organized and on track.





*“Learning ways to conserve energy for daily activities is crucial.”*

## Conserving Energy for Daily Activities

With heart failure comes fatigue, which can make completing the simplest tasks difficult. This is why it's so important that your loved one learn to conserve energy for daily tasks and activities. As their caregiver, you can help them with strategies that enable them to achieve this goal. Here are 12 tips to help them conserve energy and take excess strain off of their heart: <sup>11</sup>

1. Plan and prioritize daily activities in order of importance.
2. Organize tasks ahead of time to maximize efficiency and utilize less energy.
3. Schedule times of rest throughout the day to keep their energy level up—a good rule of thumb is 10 minutes of rest for every hour of activity.
4. Ensure they get ample rest every night to refuel for the next day.
5. Assemble a support system of family and friends that can help when needed.
6. Pace themselves and break larger tasks up into smaller, doable increments.
7. Keep an upright posture when sitting or standing to get more oxygen to their lungs.
8. Minimize bending and reaching actions; use a reacher, long-handled shoehorn, sock aid and wear clothing and shoes that are easy to slip on.
9. Utilize assistive devices such as a walker, walker with wheels, cane or wheelchair to ease mobility.
10. Sit when activities permit—this reduces energy use by 25 percent!
11. Practice deep breathing exercises throughout the day to stay relaxed.
12. Most importantly, they should listen to their body and rest before they get tired.

## Equipment and Assistive Devices

As you care for your loved one at home, they may need the support of special equipment and assistive devices to make the care process a little easier. This may include items such as:

- Oxygen
- Heart monitor
- Scale
- Pulse oximeter
- Blood pressure cuff
- Walker or walker with wheels
- Wheelchair
- Bedside commode\*
- Hospital bed\*

\* As fatigue increases, these can be added to conserve energy.



Their physician will determine what equipment is needed and include it in their plan of care. If you are working with a home health agency such as Interim HealthCare, they will collaborate with your physician and help coordinate equipment for your home. The durable medical equipment (DME) company will then deliver it and train you on how to use it accurately and safely.

Source: <sup>11</sup> <https://www.stjoes.ca/patients-visitors/patient-education/a-e/PD%208278%20Energy%20Conservation.pdf>

## Prescribed Therapies

A person with heart failure has many different needs. As a caregiver, you are able to meet many of those needs but there are resources available to help make managing their disease a little bit easier. Once diagnosed, their doctor may prescribe additional therapies to assist your loved one in various aspects of their care. These therapies can be a great support to you as you learn the many facets of heart failure care.

- **Physical Therapy:** A physical therapist will work with your loved one to help build their strength and endurance through safe exercises and movement. This is vital for combatting fatigue and strengthening their lungs and heart.
- **Occupational Therapy:** An occupational therapist can help your loved one learn to navigate the activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, cooking, mobility, etc.) in the most efficient way to help conserve their energy.
- **Medical Social Worker:** A medical social worker can help connect your loved one to resources in the community that can help—from meals, equipment and transportation to counseling for depression and finances for medication.

## Keeping a Close Eye on Weight

Weight is a key focus for individuals with heart failure. While it's important that your loved one is eating a low-sodium diet and getting regular exercise to keep their body strong, a sudden increase in weight signals a problem with their heart. When their body is retaining fluids, the heart has to work harder and swelling and shortness of breath typically follow. On the flip side, when they are able to maintain a steady weight, it's an indication that things are going well on the inside.

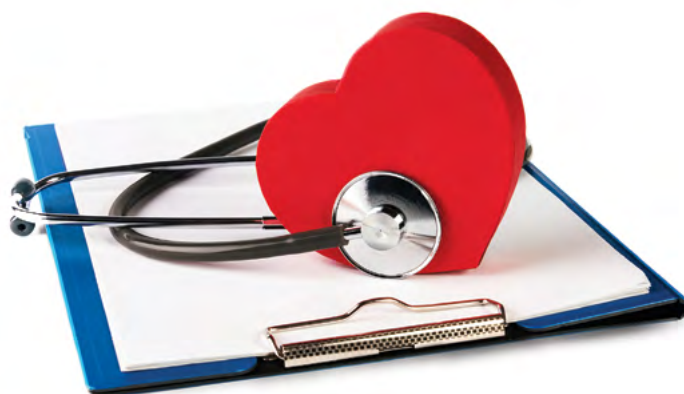
The ability to maintain a healthy weight will benefit them physically, mentally and emotionally, while taking stress off of their heart caused by obesity. These are all helpful in managing their heart failure and living a quality life.

## Caring for Their Body, Controlling Heart Failure

Helping your loved one learn how to care for their body is critical to managing their heart failure. While some of these changes may be very difficult to make, they are necessary to controlling their disease and living a healthy life. As your loved one begins to acclimate to new foods, disciplines, medication and care regimens, they will start to see their heart failure symptoms improve—and they will feel so much better. As their caregiver, you can be a source of encouragement and strength as they learn how to care for their body and successfully manage their heart failure.

In summary, caring for their body involves a combination of efforts:

- Following a low-sodium diet
- Complying with fluid restrictions
- Tracking their weight daily
- Elevating swollen feet, ankles and legs
- Caring for shortness of breath
- Not smoking
- Exercising regularly
- Taking prescribed medication
- Conserving their energy
- Using assistive devices when needed
- Getting prescribed therapies
- Keeping a close eye on weight



## SPIRIT

*Heart failure is scary, but when your loved one knows you are in this with them, it lifts their heart, calms their emotions and inspires joy amid their health challenges. This is what care for the spirit is all about.*

### Caring for Their Emotions

After receiving a diagnosis of heart failure, your loved one may be feeling a mix of emotions, from fear and anxiety to apathy, sadness and depression. More than ever, they need to know that they are not alone in this and that you will be there to support them as they prepare to make some difficult life changes. As their caregiver, you can positively influence their state of mind and impart courage and determination where there is none. It may be a tough road to travel, but having you there to help them will make a real difference in their ability to manage their disease.

Rather than dismissing or downplaying difficult emotions, here are some ways you can constructively address them:

- Explain what heart failure is and is not—the name can be deceiving
- Ask them to share how they are feeling and offer support
- Combat their fears with knowledge and information
- Determine to help fight their disease together
- Remind them that they are not alone
- Focus on the positive aspects of these changes
- Encourage them to journal what they are feeling
- Put a plan in place to move forward positively

### Steady Changes Lead to Successful Changes

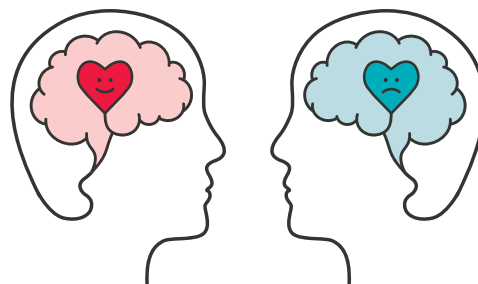
There are number of changes your loved one must make to get their heart failure under control, and it may feel overwhelming at first. The bestway to approach these changes is to take them in stride, making gradual changes and building on them over time until they achieve their health goals. A home health provider like Interim HealthCare can work with your loved one to make these changes less painful, from offering substitutions for foods they love to starting with short periods of exercise that increase over time. The hardest part is getting started, but when they start to feel the effects of these changes—less swelling, more energy and just feeling better—it will motivate them to keep going. The important thing with heart failure is that they pace themselves and keep moving forward.



## Recognizing Signs of Depression

With heart failure, it's not uncommon for your loved one to feel stress and anxiety over their diagnosis, which can lead to depression. It's a lot to take in, not to mention, all the health complications that could result if they don't get their heart failure under control. For this reason, it's important for caregivers to recognize the signs of depression so they can come alongside them with support and encouragement. Symptoms of depression vary from person to person, but may include:

- Trouble concentrating
- Unable to remember details
- Difficulty making decisions
- Fatigue
- Feelings of guilt
- Worthlessness
- Helplessness
- Pessimism
- Insomnia or sleeping too much
- Irritability
- Loss of interest in things
- Overeating
- Lack of appetite
- Aches and pains that remain
- Feeling sad and empty
- Suicidal thoughts



If you notice any of these signs, we suggest you talk to them about the potential for depression and how to combat it. Sometimes, it helps to know, these feelings are normal for a person diagnosed with heart failure and they are not alone. As their caregiver, it's important to discuss these things openly and ask them if they are experiencing any of these symptoms. While they might deny it to another person, typically family members will pick up on changes in behavior right away. If you do, talk to them about it and don't be afraid to ask the hard questions to ensure their safety and well-being.

If your loved one is dealing with depression, you need to make sure they are not thinking of harming themselves or committing suicide. If the thought has entered their mind, oftentimes, they will admit it. So, it's really helpful for them to know, depression over their diagnosis is normal and what they need now is support. Then, proceed with getting qualified clinical therapy to help them. If you are concerned that they will hurt themselves, consult their doctor right away and make a plan for them to receive counseling.

## Initiate Activities That Infuse Joy

It's easy for someone with heart failure to feel stressed and worried. As their caregiver, you can help de-escalate negative emotions by shifting their focus to something more positive. Leading them in some relaxing breathing exercises is one way to calm their anxiety.

Purposing to add joy to each day is a key part of Interim HealthCare's HomeLife Enrichment® model of care. Heart failure affects so much more than just their physical body; it impacts their mind, spirit and family as well. If your loved one is feeling the weight of their disease emotionally, getting their heart failure under control is going to be an uphill battle. As their caregiver, you can lift their spirit by initiating activities that bring joy and happiness to their day, including:

- Hobbies
- Drawing and painting
- Puzzles, cards or board games
- Memory recollection and reminiscing
- Virtual tours (destinations, museum, zoos, art galleries)
- Music and virtual concerts
- Writing letters or journaling
- Spending time with friends and family
- Going for a drive to a favorite place
- Gardening and caring for plants and flowers
- Reading a book and discussing it together





## FAMILY

*Care for the family involves educating, guiding and supporting those caring for a loved one with heart failure. It fosters understanding, improves overall outcomes and encourages self-care.*

### Family Plays a Key Role in the Care Process

When a loved one is facing the challenges of heart failure, having the support of family members makes a significant difference. If they understand what causes heart failure, how to recognize its symptoms and how to respond, they'll be a second layer of support to their loved one as they learn the essentials of self-care.

At Interim HealthCare, we're here to support families by providing the resources, tools and advice they need to be the informed and compassionate caregivers their loved one needs. By engaging family in the care process, individuals are better equipped to gain control of their health and live a quality life.

### Education and Training Leads to Better Outcomes

As you learn the basics of heart failure care, you'll gain the understanding and confidence required to care for your loved one in practical ways. You'll also be a source of accountability and encouragement as they learn the regimens of heart failure care and adapt to a new normal.

As their caregiver, here are some important aspects of care you should become familiar with:

- Understanding heart failure and how it affects the body
- Recognizing symptoms of heart failure and how to manage them
- Weighing every morning and recording daily weights
- Following the prescribed medication regimen
- Conserving energy and elevating swollen feet and legs
- Adhering to fluid restrictions and a low-sodium diet
- Assisting with oxygen when shortness of breath occurs
- Notifying their doctor if weight gain exceeds three pounds in a day or five pounds in a week
- Ensuring doctor appointments are kept and the care plan is followed

### Checklist for Heart Failure Care:

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stick to a low-sodium diet        | <input type="checkbox"/> Limit caffeine and alcohol  | <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce stressors in life   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stay away from animal fats        | <input type="checkbox"/> Quit smoking                | <input type="checkbox"/> Rest up to conserve energy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make exercise a part of their day | <input type="checkbox"/> Elevate swollen feet/legs   | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep doctor's appointments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take medications as prescribed    | <input type="checkbox"/> Weigh daily and document it | <input type="checkbox"/> Move toward self-care      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce the amount of fluid intake |  |   |

### Self-Care is the Ultimate Goal

While heart failure is serious, it is not the end of good health for your loved one. If they follow the care plan prescribed by their doctor, they can go on to live a quality life. That's the goal and self-care is the way to get there. As their caregiver, you can support them in this effort and encourage them in their health journey—and this guide will give you the insights you need to do it.

## Heart failure is serious, but we'll be here to support you.

When a family member is diagnosed with heart failure, they will need to make some serious life changes to get their health under control. If they do, they can significantly improve their symptoms and continue to live a quality life.

As their caregiver, it's important that you understand heart failure and how to manage it so you can help them along in their journey to better health. Our Heart Failure Caregiver's Guide will provide answers to many of your questions about heart failure as well as guidance on how to care for them.

Since 1966, Interim HealthCare has been helping individuals with heart failure find the resources, care and support they need to successfully manage their disease. As a home health provider, we understand the challenges your loved one is facing and we're able to provide the specialized care they need to overcome each hurdle and live a healthier life.

Our Heart Failure Program is founded on our HomeLife Enrichment® philosophy, a holistic approach to care that engages the mind, body, spirit and family. This distinctive model is designed to care for the whole individual, not just one part. That's what makes it so successful.

Another critical factor in their ability to manage their disease is having a caregiver who will be there to support to them each step of the way. You play such a vital role in their care and we know, it's not always easy. As you care for them, we're here to support you however we can.

To learn more about our Heart Failure Program, reach out to one of our offices and let us know how we can help you. Visit us online at [www.interimhealthcare.com](http://www.interimhealthcare.com) to find an office near you.



## Heart Healthy Shopping List

When a family member is diagnosed with heart failure, they will need to make some serious life changes to get their health under control. If they do, they can significantly improve their symptoms and continue to live a quality life.

### Fresh Vegetables:

- Spinach
- Carrots
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Onion
- Mushrooms
- Peppers

### Fresh Fruits:

- Apples
- Oranges
- Bananas
- Peaches
- Berries
- Kiwi
- Cantaloupe

### Grains, Breads and Pasta:

- Brown or wild rice
- Quinoa
- Barley
- Couscous
- Sweet potatoes
- Acorn squash
- Whole wheat pasta
- Whole grain cereal
- Whole grain bread/buns
- Whole grain bagels
- Whole grain English muffins
- Whole grain tortillas

### Protein:

- Fish or shellfish
- Skinless chicken
- Skinless turkey breast
- Lean beef or pork
- Unsalted nuts/seeds
- Dried beans/peas
- Kidney beans
- Black beans
- Lima beans
- Chickpeas
- Lentils
- Egg substitute

### Dairy:

- Nonfat milk, 1% milk or soy milk
- Low-fat yogurt
- Unsalted margarine
- Low-sodium cheese

### Vegetable Oils:

- Canola oil
- Corn oil
- Olive oil
- Peanut oil
- Soybean oil
- Sunflower oil

### Flavors and Seasonings:

- Spices
- Salt-free seasoning blends
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Red pepper
- Lemon/lime juice
- Low-sodium condiments/dressing

### Snacks:

- Unsalted popcorn
- Low-sodium chips
- Low-sodium pretzels
- Vanilla wafers
- Graham crackers
- Whole wheat crackers
- Dried fruit

### Helpful Hints:

- Avoid processed fruits and vegetables
- Check sodium per serving on nutritional label
- Select bread, cereal and grains with 5% (or less) of daily value of sodium
- Select frozen, canned or dried fruits with no sugar added
- Rinse canned vegetables to reduce sodium content
- Do not add salt when cooking brown rice or pasta
- Use margarine with no trans fats/less saturated fats



## Fill Their Plate With Heart-Healthy Food

As your loved one changes their eating habits, it's helpful to have a gauge of what foods should be on their plate. The Plate Method is a simple, visual way to ensure they are eating the right foods in the right proportions.

**50%**  
of their plate should be non-starchy vegetables and fruit:

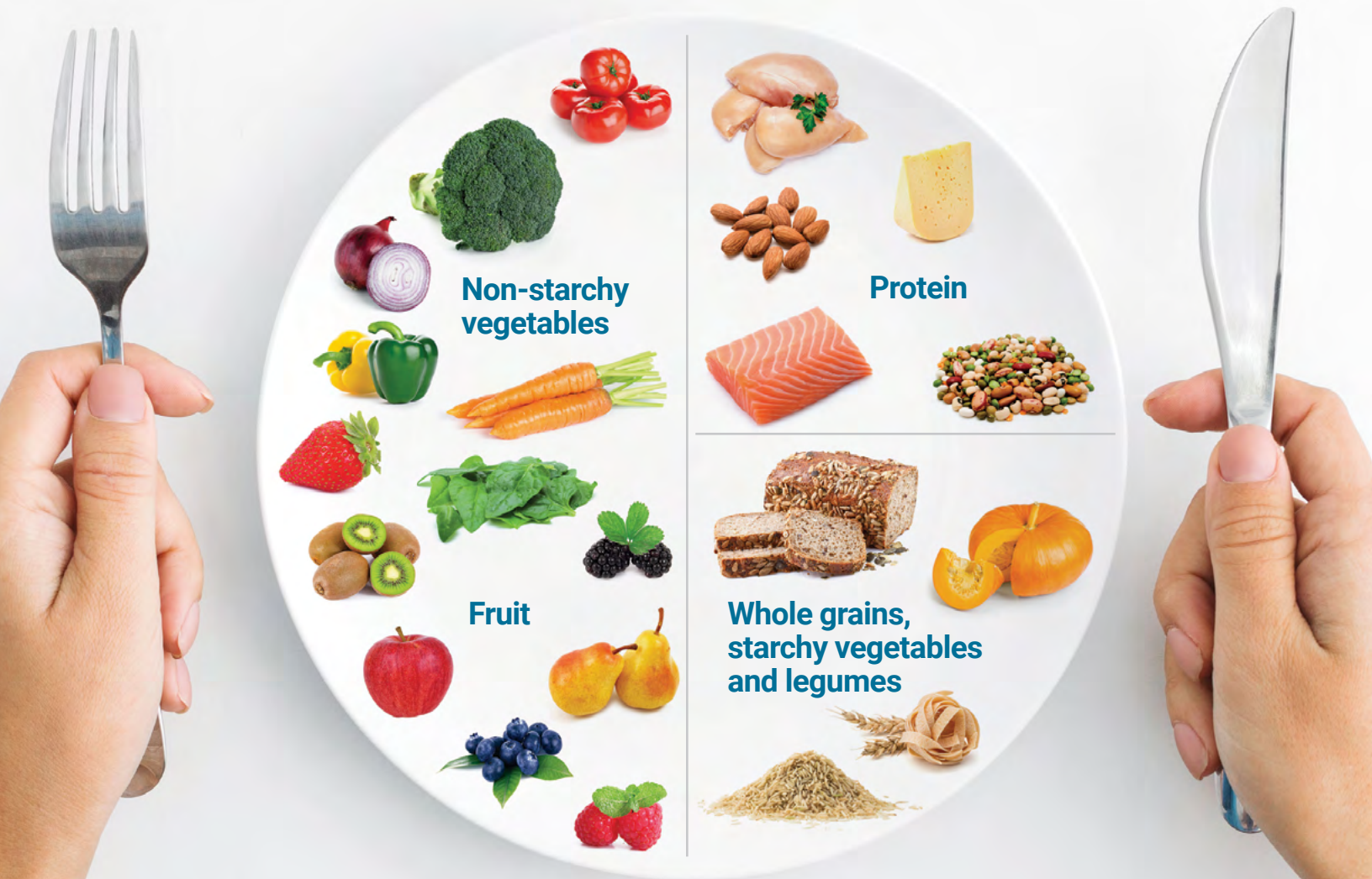
- Broccoli
- Spinach
- Cabbage
- Apples
- Pears
- Berries

**25%**  
of their plate should be protein:

- Fish and Shellfish
- Skinless chicken
- Lean meat/pork
- Beans/lentils
- Unsalted nuts
- Low-fat cheese

**25%**  
of their plate should be whole grains and starchy vegetables:

- Barley
- Brown rice
- Whole wheat pasta
- Quinoa
- Squash
- Sweet potatoes



## Calculating Sodium in Food

A low-sodium diet can be tricky to figure out. This is because many foods already contain salt and it can add up quickly when you start looking at serving sizes and what you're loved one is actually eating. Here are a few tips to help you calculate sodium and stay on track with their diet.

### TYPICAL LOW-SODIUM DIET = 2,000 MG/DAY

#### Sodium Measurements

¼ tsp salt = 575 mg sodium

½ tsp salt = 1,150 mg sodium

¾ tsp salt = 1,725 mg sodium

1 tsp salt = 2,300 mg sodium

#### Sources of Sodium<sup>12</sup>

- 5% Added while cooking (table salt)
- 6% Added while eating (table salt, condiments)
- 12% Natural sources (vegetables, dairy products, meat, shellfish)
- 77% Processed and prepared food (cold cuts, bacon, cheese, soup, bread, pizza, fast food, prepared meals)

#### Reading Food Labels<sup>13</sup>

Calculating sodium requires you to read food labels carefully. In addition to sodium, it may also include ingredients that have salt or sodium-containing compounds, such as:

- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Baking soda (also called sodium bicarbonate)
- Baking powder
- Disodium phosphate
- Sodium alginate
- Sodium citrate
- Sodium nitrite

#### Sodium Label Meanings<sup>14</sup>

Not all reduced, light or no salt added labels mean salt is in the right range. Here are some good labels to look for:

**Sodium-free or salt-free:** Each serving contains less than 5 mg of sodium

**Very low sodium:** Each serving contains 35 mg of sodium or less

**Low sodium:** Each serving contains 140 mg of sodium or less

Pay attention to serving sizes and how many servings per package.

Choose products that are less than 200 mg of sodium per serving.

Nutrition Facts	
Servings per container about 2	
Serving size 1 cup (228g)	
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>250</b>
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat</b> 12g	<b>18%</b>
Saturated Fat 3g	<b>15%</b>
Trans Fat 3g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 30mg	<b>10%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 470mg	<b>20%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 31g	<b>10%</b>
Dietary Fiber 0g	<b>0%</b>
Total Sugars 5g	
<b>Protein</b> 5g	

Source: <sup>12</sup> [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org) <sup>13,14</sup> <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/sodium/art-20045479>

## Daily Heart Failure Care Log

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ WEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_

	Medication	Sodium Intake	Fluid Intake	Exercise	Concerns: Swelling, Breathing, Weight
Breakfast					
Lunch					
Dinner					

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ WEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_

	Medication	Sodium Intake	Fluid Intake	Exercise	Concerns: Swelling, Breathing, Weight
Breakfast					
Lunch					
Dinner					

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ WEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_

	Medication	Sodium Intake	Fluid Intake	Exercise	Concerns: Swelling, Breathing, Weight
Breakfast					
Lunch					
Dinner					





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Founded in 1966, Interim HealthCare is the nation's first home care and healthcare staffing company. A recognized leader in their industry, Interim HealthCare understands the importance of providing quality care in a place that's ideal for the individuals they serve. Distinguished by their HomeLife Enrichment® signature standard of care, they engage the mind, body, spirit and family in a personalized plan of care that ensures an optimal experience for their clients.

Operating through a network of more than 300 locally owned franchises, Interim HealthCare offers a comprehensive range of home care, hospice and healthcare staffing solutions. From skilled nurses and therapists to aides and companions, they provide an average of 25 million hours of home care to 190,000 people every year.

**[interimhealthcare.com](https://www.interimhealthcare.com)**