

# Nutrition and Lifestyle Choices to Manage Heart Failure

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## What is heart failure?

Heart failure means that your heart is weaker than usual, and it doesn't pump as strongly as it should.

Heart failure can make you tired and short of breath. Some people find that their bodies hold on to extra water.

## What can you do to feel better?

The nutrition and lifestyle choices in this handout can help you to feel better and manage your heart failure.

## Symptoms of heart failure can include:

- being short of breath when you're resting or lying flat
- sudden weight gain from fluid
- swelling in your feet, ankles, and legs
- bloating or a feeling of tightness in your stomach
- needing to urinate (pee) at night
- cold hands and feet
- feeling very tired or weak
- coughing more
- unable to exercise

## Are you already making choices to manage heart failure?

Check Yes or No for each item below.

Each Yes is a choice you are already making to manage your heart failure. If you're ready to make changes, use the tips on the following pages to increase your Yes answers.

- |   |                              |                             |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. I try to avoid processed and packaged foods to eat less sodium.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2. I know if I need to track how much fluid I drink.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3. I make most of my meals at home.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4. I weigh myself every day and record my weight.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 5. I know what to do if I have sudden weight gain.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 6. I eat fish higher in omega-3 fats such as salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, trout, and Arctic char at least 2 times per week. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7. I know how to contact my healthcare team if I need to.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

# Nutrition choices

## Limit your sodium intake

Sodium (salt) acts like a sponge, keeping extra fluid in your body. Your heart will work harder to pump this extra fluid.

### Tips to lower the sodium you eat

- Cook and eat food without adding salt.
- Choose fresh, unprocessed, and homemade foods.
- Flavour your food with herbs, spices, garlic, onion, lemon juice, vinegar, and salt-free seasonings.
- Limit high sodium foods such as:
  - processed and packaged foods
  - restaurant and fast foods
  - pickles, olives, and salsa
  - deli meats
  - crackers, snack foods, dips
  - canned and dry soup
  - condiments like ketchup, soy sauce, fish sauce, and barbecue sauce
- Read food labels to help you choose lower sodium foods.

### On the Nutrition Facts table

- Compare the serving size to the amount you eat. For example, if the serving size of a cereal is ½ cup (125 mL) and you ate 1 cup (250 mL), you would get double of all the nutrients listed on the label.
- Foods with 15% or higher Daily Value are high in sodium. Limit these foods.
- Foods with 5% or lower Daily Value are low in sodium. Look for these foods.
- Compare brands. Choose foods with a lower % Daily Value and less sodium.

Nutrition Facts	
Per ¾ cup (175 g)	
Calories 160	% Daily Value*
<b>Fat</b> 2.5 g	3 %
Saturated 1.5 g	8 %
+Trans 0 g	
<b>Carbohydrate</b> 25 g	
Fibre 3 g	11 %
Sugars 15 g	15 %
<b>Protein</b> 8 g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 10 mg	
<b>Sodium</b> 75 mg	3 %

## Limit the fluid you drink

A fluid is anything that is liquid at room temperature. For some people with heart failure, limiting the fluid they drink helps them feel better.

- Ask your doctor or healthcare team if limiting your fluid would help you. Some people need to limit fluid to 6–8 cups (1500–2000 mL) a day to feel better.
- It can help to spread out the fluids you drink. Try sipping your fluids throughout the day.
- If you'd like more information about how to limit fluid, ask your healthcare provider to refer you to a dietitian.

### Tips to decrease thirst

- Suck on sugar-free hard sour candies or chew sugar-free gum.
- Rinse your mouth with water.
- Suck on a few ice chips or a sugar-free ice pop.
- Eat frozen fruit such as grapes, strawberries, peaches, or pineapple chunks.
- Eat crunchy vegetables and fruit like celery, cucumber, green peppers, or apples.
- Limit salt (sodium) intake.

### Tips to help with a dry mouth

- Brush and floss your teeth more often to keep teeth clean.
- Use lip balm to keep lips from drying out.
- Ask your doctor, dentist, or pharmacist for products that help with dry mouth.
- Use a cold air humidifier, especially at night.

## Enjoy fish at least 2 times a week

Eating fish higher in omega-3 fats has many heart health benefits.

Choose salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, trout, Arctic char, or tuna.



Eat fresh, frozen, or no salt added canned fish.

## Ask your healthcare team about potassium

Some medicines can change the amount of potassium in your blood. Ask your health care provider about your potassium levels. If your potassium is too high or too low, you may need to make changes to your diet.

If you want more information about potassium in foods, ask your health care provider to refer you to a dietitian.

## Limit the alcohol you drink

Drinking less is better for your health. Alcohol also counts as part of your fluid intake. Talk to your health care team if you have questions about alcohol and your health.

For more information, visit [ccsa.ca](http://ccsa.ca).

## Weight and heart failure

People with heart failure may be at a healthy weight, may lose too much weight, or may carry extra weight.

**If you're at a healthy weight**, try to stay there.

Some people with heart failure **lose too much weight** because they:

- need more calories than usual
- don't absorb nutrients from food as well as people without heart failure
- lose their appetite, feel nauseated, and have trouble eating enough food to stay at a healthy weight
- have less energy and feel tired more than usual; this can make it harder to make meals and eat well

If you think you've **lost too much weight**, try the tips below to get more calories and protein.

- Eat small meals more often.
- Have snacks during the day.
- Choose foods higher in calories and protein, such as:
  - meat, fish, poultry, eggs, beans, peas, lentils, and nuts
  - higher fat milk, cheese, yogurt, and cream
  - liquid vegetable oils and margarine
  - nut butters and seed butters
  - nutrition supplement drinks

If you're trying to eat well, but still losing weight, ask your healthcare provider to refer you to a dietitian.

**If you're carrying extra weight** and want to learn more about weight and heart failure, talk to your healthcare provider. Some people with heart failure gain weight as fluid.

## Track your weight

Recording your weight every day helps you and your healthcare provider know if you are holding on to extra fluid.



- Weigh yourself at the same time every day after emptying your bladder and before eating.
- Wear the same type of clothing, or no clothing, every time you weigh yourself.
- Record your weight every day.

**Sudden weight gain could mean your body is holding on to extra fluids and your heart failure is getting worse.**

Talk to your healthcare team about a plan for sudden weight gain. Write your plan here:

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**Phone number for your healthcare team:**

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## Lifestyle choices

### If you smoke, quit

When you quit smoking, your heart doesn't need to work as hard, your blood can carry more oxygen, and your blood vessels are healthier.

For help quitting, talk to your healthcare provider, call 811 (Health Link), or visit [albertaquits.ca](http://albertaquits.ca).

### Be active every day

Activity makes you stronger, and may give you a better quality of life.

- Check with your doctor or healthcare provider before you start being active.
- Try to be active every day. If you need to start with a few minutes at a time, that's ok. You can increase your time slowly.



Use a step counter (pedometer, smartwatch, or smartphone) to count your steps each day. Create daily step goals and review your progress to help you stay on track.

### Break up your sitting time

Sitting time is time watching TV, reading, using the computer at work or home, playing video games, or doing hobbies while sitting. Breaking up sitting time helps you to be more active.

Below are some tips:

- Stretch or move around when watching TV.
- Stand and move every 30 minutes.
- At work, walk to see a co-worker instead of emailing or phoning.
- Stand and walk around when you talk on the phone.
- Take the long way to the bathroom.

## Medicine

Take all of the medicine your doctor prescribes.

Talk to your healthcare team before you take:

- any other medicine, like over-the-counter cold, flu, or pain medicine
- vitamin or mineral pills
- herbal supplements or natural health products

## Set goals

Change can be hard, especially if you try to make too many changes at once.

When you're ready to make a change, it can help to set a goal, and break your goals into small steps. You're more likely to achieve smaller goals.

Ask your healthcare provider if you would like support with goal setting. To learn more, visit [ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts](http://ahs.ca/nutritionhandouts) and search "setting goals".

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## For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](http://ahs.ca/811) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit [ahs.ca/nutrition](http://ahs.ca/nutrition).
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta (<https://ab.211.ca/>) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.