

PATIENT INFORMATION

HEART FAILURE



Useful Resources

- Irish Heart Foundation : www.irishheart.ie
- Croi – Fighting Heart Disease and Stroke : www.croi.ie

What Is Heart Failure



The term Heart failure can be frightening, however it does not mean that your heart is about to stop, it just means that it is not working as efficiently as it should.



This leads to inadequate blood flow to other organs, such as the kidneys, and build up of fluid in other vital organs, such as the lungs.



During times of increased physical activity, such as climbing stairs, the body needs more oxygen which is pumped through the blood stream. When a person has heart failure, the heart cannot always adjust to this demand.



Although Heart failure is a serious condition, safe and effective treatments are available which, along with a healthy lifestyle, can relieve symptoms and help you to live healthier for longer.

TYPES OF HEART FAILURE

You may have been told some terms about your diagnosis, there are two main types of heart failure.

- Heart Failure with reduced ejection fraction (HFrEF)

The heart is too **weak** to pump efficiently meaning the heart does not **squeeze** normally.

- Heart Failure with preserved ejection fraction (HFpEF)

The heart is too **stiff** to pump efficiently meaning the heart does not **relax** and refill normally.

Common Symptoms

These are some of the most common symptoms people experience. Knowing these is helpful so that you can discuss them with your GP or nurse.

- Shortness of breath
- Ankle swelling
- Sudden intermittent weight gain
- Breathlessness when lying down (Orthopnoea) - you may need to sleep up on several pillows
- Waking at night breathless (Paroxysmal Nocturnal Dyspnoea, or PND)
- Reduced exercise tolerance
- Fatigue and longer recovery time after exercise
- Depression
- Irregular heart rate +/- palpitations
- Persistent cough

Medications

- It is very important to ensure that there is as little stress as possible on your heart to allow it to work as efficiently as it can.
- You have most likely been prescribed some or all of the following medications by your GP or cardiologist and it is important to ensure that you are on the best dose for you.
 1. Anti-Hypertensive which lowers your blood pressure.
 2. Beta-Blocker which helps your heart to beat more slowly.
 3. Diuretic which removes excess water from your body as urine.

Why Check Weight?



A sudden increase in weight can be an indication of deterioration of your condition caused by a build up of fluid.



Fluid build up can cause breathlessness and swelling in your feet or ankles



Addressing this quickly can alleviate symptoms and prevent deterioration and /or hospital admissions.

Why Check Blood Pressure?



Stable blood pressure improves the ability of your heart to pump more effectively.



An increase in blood pressure means that your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body.



Too much of a decrease in blood pressure may indicate dehydration or the need for adjustment in your medication.



Addressing any relevant changes quickly can alleviate symptoms and prevent deterioration and possible hospital admission.

Why Check Heart Rate?



A regular heart rate and rhythm means your heart is pumping in a stable manner.



An increase in heart rate can be caused by your heart pumping less effectively.



Heart rate can be increased if you have a build up of fluid in your body.



Addressing significant changes in heart rate can help to alleviate symptoms and prevent deterioration and/or hospital admissions.



LIFESTYLE CHANGES AND MEDICATIONS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOLS YOU HAVE TO TREAT YOUR HEART FAILURE.



A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE WILL HELP YOU MANAGE YOUR CONDITION AND PREVENT IT FROM WORSENING



REDUCE YOUR SALT INTAKE AS SALT CAN INCREASE BLOOD PRESSURE AND WORSEN FLUID RETENTION.



REDUCE YOUR CHOLESTEROL WITH A HEART-HEALTHY DIET AS INCREASED CHOLESTEROL BLOCKS YOUR ARTERIES.



EXERCISE REGULARLY TO YOUR TOLERANCE LEVEL.



REDUCE OR AVOID ALCOHOL INTAKE AS ALCOHOL CAN DAMAGE THE HEART MUSCLE.



IF YOU ARE A SMOKER – QUIT AS SMOKING DAMAGES THE LINING OF THE ARTERIES AND THE CHEMICALS IN CIGARETTES DAMAGE THE HEART MUSCLE.

Lifestyle

Diet

You may be eating plenty of food but your body may not be getting the nutrients it needs to be healthy.

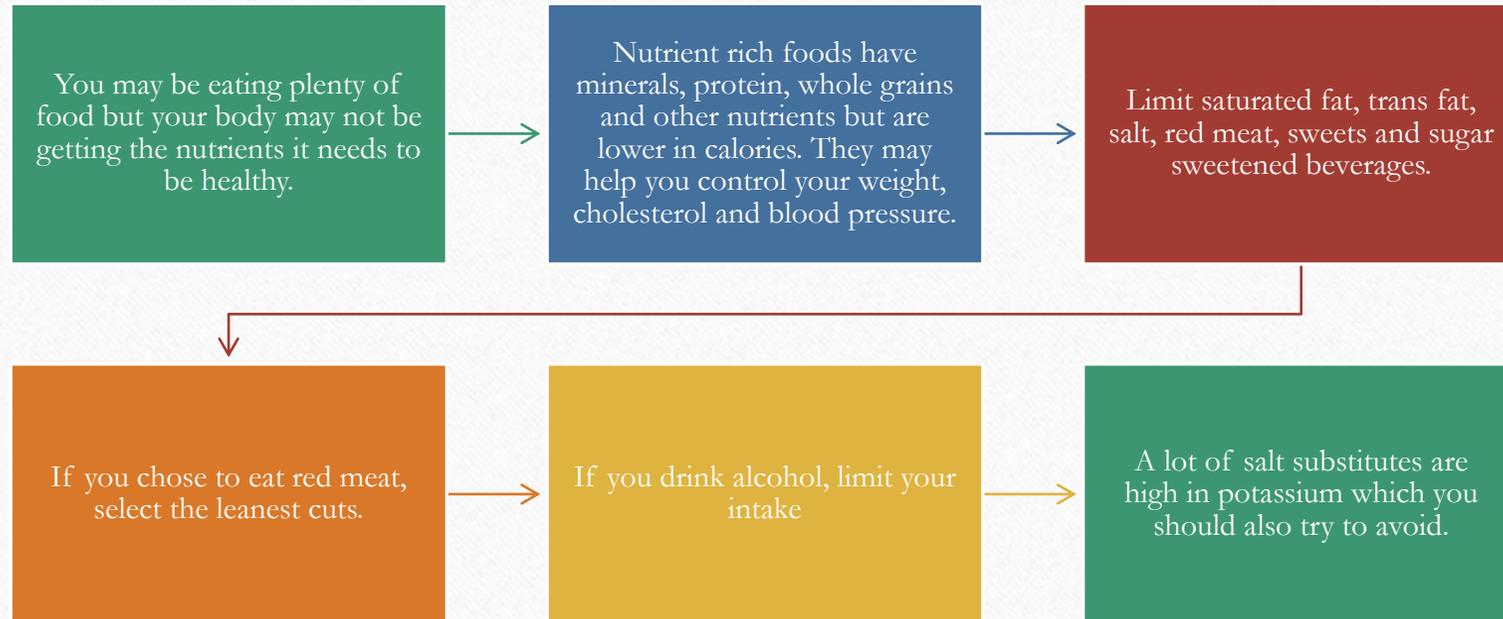
Nutrient rich foods have minerals, protein, whole grains and other nutrients but are lower in calories. They may help you control your weight, cholesterol and blood pressure.

Limit saturated fat, trans fat, salt, red meat, sweets and sugar sweetened beverages.

If you chose to eat red meat, select the leanest cuts.

If you drink alcohol, limit your intake

A lot of salt substitutes are high in potassium which you should also try to avoid.



Recommendations for a Healthy Eating Pattern



Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables



Choose fibre-rich whole grains.



Choose poultry and fish without skin and prepare them in healthy ways.



Eat a variety of fish, at least twice a week. Choose fish rich in Omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, trout and herring.



Choose fat free or low-fat dairy products.



Choose foods with low sodium and try to avoid adding salt to your meals.



Cut back on beverages and food with added sugar.



If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation.

Exercise

- Keeping active can improve the symptoms of Heart Failure and improve your physical and mental wellbeing.
- The key is to exercise to your own ability and with the advice of your doctor: a good rule of thumb is that if you can walk and sing at the same time you could be pushing yourself a little more but you should be able to talk comfortably while you walk.
- Always do a gentle 10 minute warm up and cool down to ease your muscles into the activity.
- Start off slowly and build up gradually. Remember, we all have our own physical limitations.
- You can find lots of tips and advice on getting active on the Croi and Irish Heart Foundation websites.



Useful Information



Immunisations: Ensuring that you get your annual Flu shot and are up to date with your Pneumococcal vaccines can help you to avoid unnecessary infections.



Sleep: Avoid taking your diuretics (water tablets) after 4pm to reduce sleep disturbance.



Sexual Activity: Heart Failure should not prevent you from engaging in sexual activity, unless it causes undue symptoms. If erectile dysfunction is an issue talk to your doctor as there are medical treatments available.



Mood: Be aware of how your condition may affect your mood. Maybe include family members or a friend in the self-management of your Heart Failure. Talk to your doctor if you are struggling with low mood or depressive symptoms.

Travel and Leisure Activities



Plan your travel according to your physical abilities.



Monitor and adapt fluid intake according to humidity. Monitor your heart rate, weight, and blood pressure.



Carry your medication in your hand luggage and bring a list of your medications and doses with their generic names.



Be aware of adverse reactions that result from sun exposure when taking some medications.



Be aware of the effects of altitude on your oxygen levels.