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# Heart failure Lifestyle changes to help you manage your heart failure



HEART FAILURE PATIENT ALLIANCE



**CRÍ**  
Fighting Heart Disease & Stroke

The  
**Heartbeat**  
Trust



The Heartbeat Trust is Ireland's national heart failure charity (CHY 5938). It supports specialist clinical and research services in heart failure and heart failure prevention.



*Fighting Heart Disease & Stroke*

Cró is a registered Irish heart and stroke charity (CHY7500). It is committed to excellence in cardiovascular disease prevention, early detection, rehabilitation, education, research, patient and family support.

# Managing Heart Failure

## Contents

About this booklet	2
What can I do to cope with heart failure?	3
What lifestyle changes can I make to help manage my heart failure?	6
What other lifestyle advice should I follow?	14



HEART FAILURE PATIENT ALLIANCE

The Heart Failure Patient Alliance is a national forum that represents the heart failure patient voice. This is a joint initiative by the Heartbeat Trust and Croí.

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Heart failure educational resource for patients and carers.

This booklet is based on the guidelines developed by European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and The Heartbeat Trust.

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Supported by:



## Lifestyle changes to help you manage your heart failure

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### About this booklet

There are lots of things you can do to manage your symptoms. This booklet explains how healthy lifestyle choices can help you feel better and lead a fuller life.



## What can I do to cope with heart failure?

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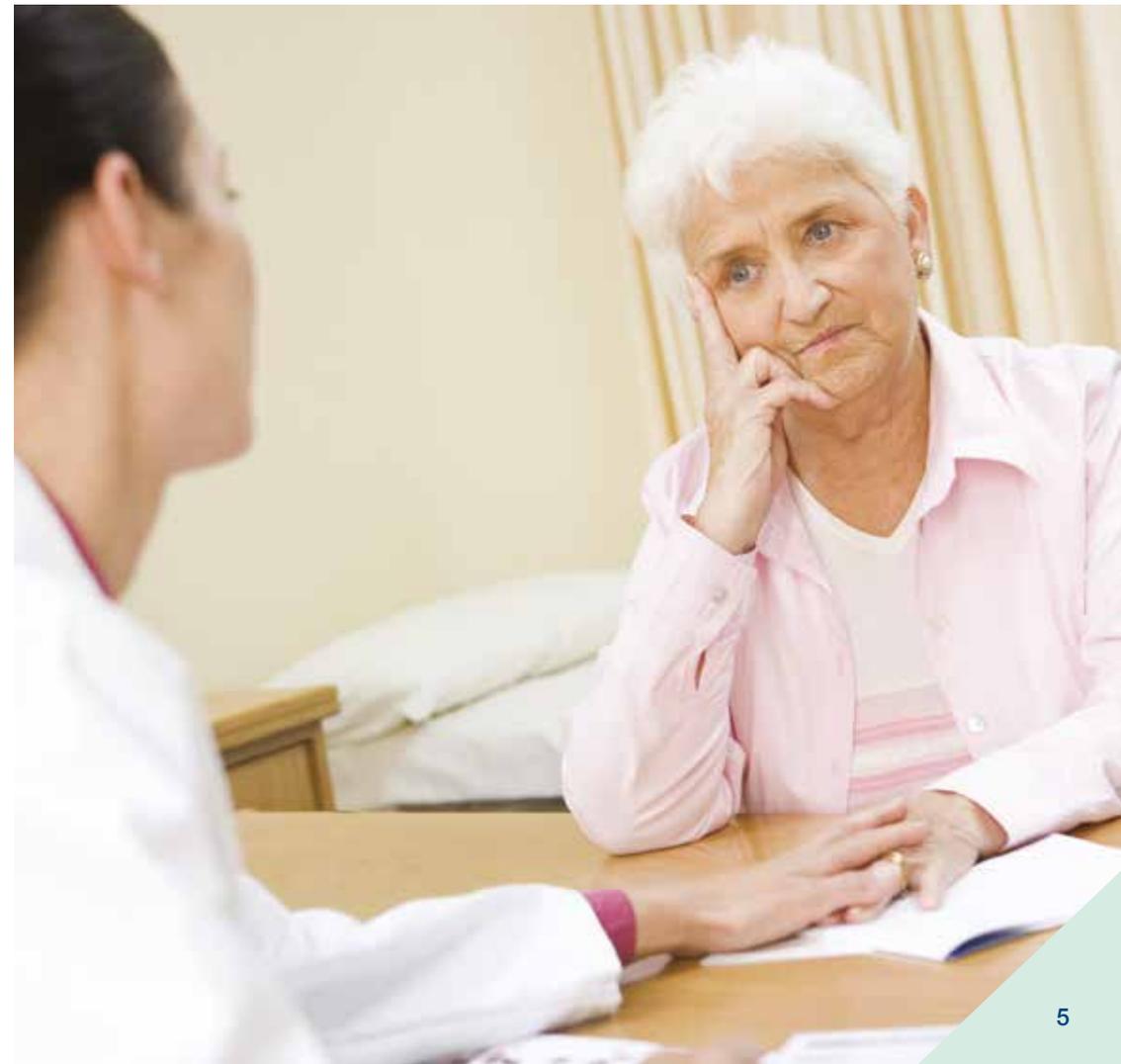
Being told you have heart failure can be upsetting, but with good heart failure management you can live very well. Coping strategies can help to reduce the stress you feel about your diagnosis. It is very important to talk about your feelings with people you trust and respect such as your family, friends or family doctor (GP).

You may feel worried or depressed. These feelings are perfectly normal. Low spirits can make you feel sad and tired. You might not feel like eating and find that you wake up much earlier than normal. When you are worried, you can lose interest in how you look and in doing your normal activities such as hobbies and meeting friends.

However, as you begin to take charge of your health and make positive changes, you may find these feelings start to fade. It is important to learn how to manage your feelings. Here are some suggestions that might help.

- Get dressed every day, even if you don't feel like it.
- Go out for a short walk even a if it's only for five minutes.
- Keep up with activities or hobbies you enjoy.
- Share your feelings and thoughts with people you trust.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Listen to your body. You know your limitations better than anyone.
- Learn about your heart condition so you can make informed choices about your health.
- Follow the advice of your healthcare team.

If negative feelings continue to interfere with your ability to enjoy life, talk to your doctor to see if counselling might help you feel better.



# What lifestyle changes can I make to help manage my heart failure?

## Healthy eating

One of the easiest changes you can make is to eat a healthy and balanced diet. This will help you to:

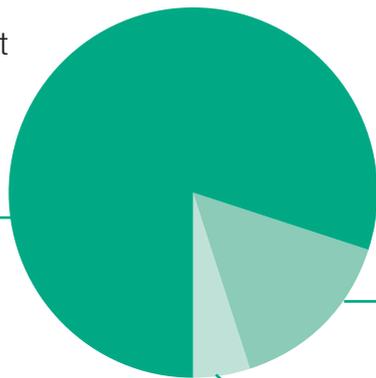
- reach or maintain a healthy body weight;
- control some of your symptoms; and
- feel better.

## Cut down on salt

This is really important. Too much salt in your diet can make your body hold on to water (retain fluid) and worsen your heart failure symptoms.

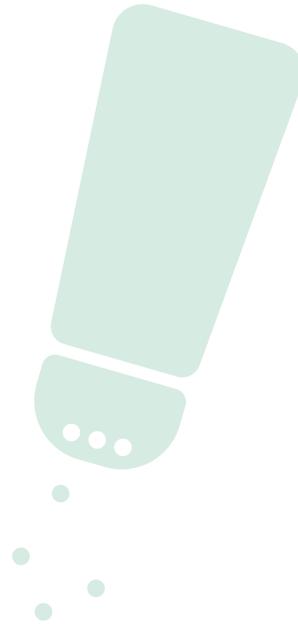
Main sources of salt in the Irish diet:

**80%** comes from processed foods, fast food, canteen and restaurant food.



**10–15%** is added at home in cooking or at the table.

Only **5%** occurs naturally in food.



**Don't add salt** in cooking or at the table. **Eat more fresh foods** and **less processed foods**.

Here are some ways to limit salt in your diet:

High-salt foods	Low-salt alternatives
Processed meats (bacon, ham, sausages)	Fresh meat
Cheese particularly hard and blue cheeses	Cottage cheese
Smoked or tinned fish	Fresh fish
Tinned foods (soup, baked beans, vegetables)	Fresh or frozen vegetables, home-made soup, reduced-salt baked beans
Bottled sauces such as soy sauce, ketchup, chutney, pickles, salad cream	Home-made sauces, fromage frais, natural yoghurt
Crisps, salted or dry roasted peanuts	Unsalted popcorn, unsalted nuts and seeds
Stock cubes, packet sauces, casserole mixes	Low salt stock cubes, herbs and spices

### How can I use less salt in my cooking?

Try adding spices, pepper, garlic, herbs, lemon juice or vinegar to add flavour. Here are a few ideas.

- Use different spices and herbs.
- Toast seeds, nuts and spices to bring out their flavour.
- Use mustard to spice up recipes, salad dressings and meals.
- Add fresh chilli, ginger or garlic to dishes.
- Use tinned tomatoes and tomato purée as a base for casseroles, sauces and soups.
- Marinate fish or meat before cooking to give more flavour.
- Add lemon or lime juice to fish.

### Other types of salt

Any form of salt can increase blood pressure. Sea salt, rock salt and garlic salt have the same salt or sodium content as common salt. Salts described as low salt are mixtures of sodium and potassium, where potassium has been added to reduce the sodium content. If you have heart failure you should not use a low salt variety without medical advice. Flavour your meals using the tips above.

### Having a healthy weight

#### Why is a healthy body weight important?

Maintaining a healthy weight is important to keep your heart working as well as it can.

If you are **overweight**, your **heart has to work harder** to pump blood around your body. Losing excess body fat may help reduce your symptoms of heart failure as well as reduce the risk of other health complications such as diabetes.

In contrast, some people with heart failure lose weight without trying to due to their illness or poor appetite. This is also damaging to health. Being underweight can reduce your energy levels and weaken your immune system, making you more likely to get infections.

Whether you need to gain weight or lose weight, ask your dietitian, doctor or nurse for help and advice.

#### I am overweight and want to lose weight – what can I do?

The best way to lose weight is to cut down your calorie intake and increase your physical activity, in other words, eat less and exercise more. But it's best to lose weight slowly and steadily – about a pound (half a kilo) a week. This way it's much more likely that you won't put the weight back on again.

A good diet is important for good health. Eating a variety of foods can help you manage your weight and improve your general health and wellbeing.

Here are 11 tips for successful weight loss:

1. Always eat breakfast.
2. Eat 3 meals a day.
3. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.
4. Choose wholegrain and wholemeal varieties of bread, rolls, pasta, rice and breakfast cereals.
5. Read food labels to avoid foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt.
6. Plan home cooked healthy meals instead of eating out.
7. Use a smaller plate.
8. Cut down on alcohol – it's high in calories.
9. Keep a food diary.
10. Be more active. Exercise helps with weight loss.
11. Ask for support from your family, friends and healthcare team.

### **My appetite is poor and I am losing weight – what can I do?**

It is important to tell your nurse or doctor if you are underweight or losing weight (without trying to), or if you can't put weight on. They can refer you to a dietitian for advice.





## What other lifestyle advice should I follow?

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- **Alcohol:** Alcohol is not forbidden if you have heart failure. However, the amount that each patient can drink will vary depending on each person's individual circumstances. Therefore, your heart failure nurse or doctor will discuss the amount of alcohol that is safe for you to drink.
- **Tea, coffee and cola:** Tea, coffee and cola are high in caffeine. Caffeine can increase your heart rate and blood pressure and cause problems if you have an abnormal heart rhythm. Try and drink no more than 2 to 3 of these drinks a day.
- **Other fluids:** Generally, we do not suggest that you limit the amount of fluid you drink in a 24-hour period. The general advice is to drink when you are thirsty. However, there may be certain conditions or certain times that your doctor may ask you to limit your fluid intake.
- **Smoking:** If you are a smoker, quitting is one of the best things that you can do for your health. Smoking makes your heart work harder. It reduces the amount of oxygen that your blood can carry and narrows the walls of your blood vessels, which can make the symptoms of heart failure worse. There are a number of different ways of stop smoking and getting the help and support you need can double your chances of successfully quitting for good. If you have tried to quit before, remember that many smokers try a number of times before they quit for good.

### For more advice and support:

Speak to your GP or Pharmacist about nicotine replacement therapies and medications.

National Smokers Quitline 1800 201 203 for one to one personal support.

Visit [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie) to sign up for the online Quit Plan.

Visit [www.facebook.com/HSEquit](https://www.facebook.com/HSEquit) for further support.

- **Physical activity:** Exercise and physical activity can help you to:
  - improve shortness of breath and tiredness;
  - improve your fitness;
  - reduce stress;
  - reduce your blood pressure; and
  - help your mood.

### What are the goals for exercise?

Ideally you should exercise for at least 150 minutes per week in bouts of 10 minutes or more.

Following the F.I.T.T principle can help you plan and organise your exercise weekly:

F

**Frequency:** Try to get aerobic exercise 5 days a week. Strengthening work should be completed 2 days a week.

I

**Intensity:** Take it easy at the beginning and gradually increase what you are doing. Always be aware of not pushing yourself too hard – as long as you are at a moderate level where you can speak while you're exercising, you are managing the intensity of the activity correctly. Remember to warm up before and cool down after any activity. If you experience chest pain, dizziness or nausea you should stop exercising immediately. If these symptoms continue, contact your doctor or nurse.

T

**Time:** Your exercise should start gradually; this may be 5–10 min bouts. Your aim as you improve is to exercise for approximately 20–30mins.

T

**Type:** Aerobic exercise includes walking, swimming, cycling, jogging, running. etc. Strengthening work includes weight training.

For plenty of tips and advice on physical activity, visit:

[www.getirelandactive.ie](http://www.getirelandactive.ie)  
[www.getirelandwalking.ie](http://www.getirelandwalking.ie)  
[www.iscp.ie](http://www.iscp.ie)



- **Sexual relationships:** Many people with heart failure are not sure if they can have sex because of their condition. It is important to not be embarrassed in discussing any concerns that you may have with your doctor or nurse. Heart failure can affect your energy, desire or ability to participate in sexual activity. While much of this may be due to the medications that you are taking, feelings of stress, anxiety and depression can result in loss of interest in sex. The good news is that you can have a normal sexual relationship if your symptoms are managed well. Keep in mind that a sexual relationship has both a physical and emotional aspect to it, so it is important to talk openly with your partner. If you have any concerns talk to your doctor or nurse.

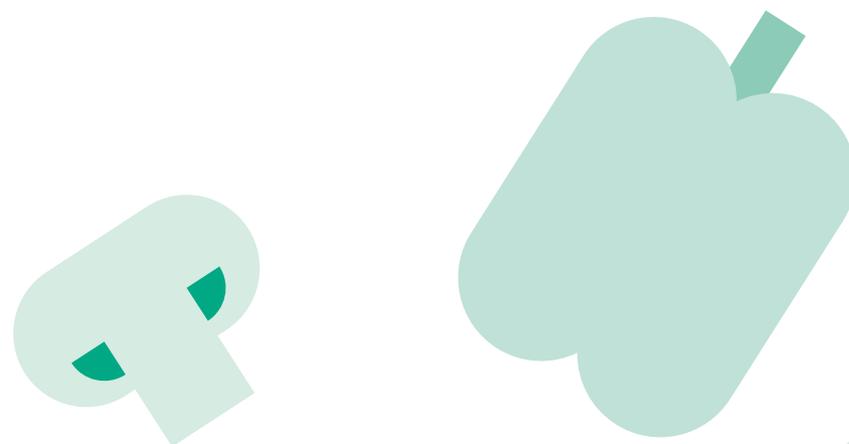
- **Vaccinations:** You should get the flu and pneumococcal vaccine as recommended by your GP.

### **Will my heart failure affect my work?**

Most people with heart failure can continue to work as long as they feel able to and their symptoms are stable. However, some people may need to make some changes.

If you have a manual job – for example, one that involves heavy lifting – you may need to think about changing your job to reduce the pressure on your heart. Talk to your employer they may be able to help you make these changes.

You may also decide that you need to reduce your hours to help you cope with your symptoms. Discuss this with your doctor and your employer to see what would suit you and your condition best.



### What about holidays and flying?

A holiday can give you the chance to rest and relax. Here are some tips when planning your holiday.

- Stay in accommodation that is easily accessible or has a lift.
- Avoid hilly places unless you are fit enough for that level of activity.
- Keep an up-to-date list of all your medicines with you just in case you lose any of them.
- Carry your medicines in your hand luggage.
- Make sure you have travel insurance.
- Talk to your doctor about whether you can fly.
- If you are travelling by air, make sure that you have frequent breaks when you can get up and walk around – particularly on long haul flights.
- Plan all journeys so that you have plenty of time to get to where you need to go.
- Do not carry heavy bags.
- Arrange to have wheelchair assistance in the airport if you need it.



## More information

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To access online educational resources for heart failure, please log on to [www.heartbeat-trust.ie](http://www.heartbeat-trust.ie) or [www.croi.ie](http://www.croi.ie). You will find helpful tips and advice from people living with heart failure, their families, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and dieticians.

### Useful websites:

[www.heartbeat-trust.ie](http://www.heartbeat-trust.ie)  
[www.croi.ie](http://www.croi.ie)  
[www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)  
[www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)  
[www.heartfailurematters.org](http://www.heartfailurematters.org)  
[www.keepitpumping.com](http://www.keepitpumping.com)



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