

Primary Care Heart Failure Patient Advice Sheet

Follow up: you may be referred by your GP to be seen in the cardiology outpatient clinic or remain under your GP for ongoing management of heart failure. Some patients may also be referred to a heart failure specialist nurse. You will be told by your GP what follow up to expect.

Monitoring your blood pressure and pulse: you should purchase a home **blood pressure monitor** (HBPM), take regular readings and keep a record of your blood pressure, pulse rate and note if your pulse feels regular or irregular so you can share them with your doctor or nurse when you have a review.

Monitoring your weight: weigh yourself every morning. If your weight goes up you could be retaining fluid. Either tell your doctor or nurse or self-manage (if you have been advised to) if your weight goes up by 2 – 4 pounds (about 1 kilo) in 2 days as you may need a change to your treatment.

Worsening of symptoms: if you notice a worsening of your breathlessness, have more ankle swelling, or notice a sudden weight gain, if your doctor or nurse has advised you then self manage for 3 days or telephone your doctor or nurse as you may need a change to your treatment.

Self Management of diuretics for 3 days: if sudden weight increase and/or worsening symptoms if indicated your doctor or nurse may give you a self management advice sheet.

Activity: try to be as active as your condition allows. Walking is good and can be built into your daily regime. If you get breathless during exercise, you should slow down or stop.

Rest: if you have oedema (swelling) in your legs it will help when resting to elevate your legs on a footstool. If your breathing feels

more difficult lying flat in bed try increasing the amount of pillows you use.

Diet: it is important to reduce the amount of salt in your diet as it can make you retain water. Do not add salt at the table and avoid cooking with it. Avoid salty foods such as Marmite, Bovril and crisps. Convenience foods are also particularly high in salt. In addition we recommend a ‘healthy diet’: reduce the amount of saturated fat, aim to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, and eat fish twice a week.

Alcohol: drinking too much can sometimes make your heart failure worse so drink no more than 1 or 2 units of alcohol a day. Some patients will be advised to have none.

Medication: you will be started on a number of drugs that will improve your symptoms and are a key part of your treatment. It is important to continue taking the medication unless instructed differently by your doctor or nurse. If you have any problems taking your medicines or getting supplies please speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Smoking: if you smoke, stop smoking. If you would like a referral to a smoking cessation service who can support you through this process please talk to your doctor or nurse.

Vaccines: make sure you have an annual flu vaccine and a one off vaccine for pneumonia.

Support: If you have any questions please ask your doctor or nurse. Further information can also be found in the **resource page** where the **British Heart Foundation Heart Failure hub** and the **Pumping Marvellous Foundation Heart Failure Toolkit** hold all their resources for patients and families.

Heart Failure Patient – 3 day Self-Management Advice

Look out for signs and symptoms of excess fluid. If your weight goes up suddenly overnight or over a couple of days by 2-4lbs or 1-2 kgs, you notice increased breathlessness, and / or increased swelling in the ankles / legs.

ACTION: take an extra water (diuretic) tablet for 3 days then reduce back to your usual prescribed dose.

So if you take Bumetanide take 1mg extra tablet for 3 days.

Or if you take Furosemide take 20mg or 40mg extra tablet for 3 days.

On day 4 when you have returned to your usual dose of Bumetanide or Furosemide, check how your symptoms are? Have they improved? Has your weight gone down? Leg swelling reduced? Breathlessness improved?

ACTION: If the answer is **NO** to these questions then please contact whoever supports you to manage your heart failure condition, this could be your GP or Specialist Heart Failure Team. You will need to discuss with them that your symptoms haven't improved and agree an ongoing plan. You will also need a blood test arranged if the extra diuretic continues for longer than the 3 days.

If you have a productive cough and are coughing up yellow or green sputum then it is likely you have a chest infection and you may need antibiotics.

ACTION: Please telephone your **GP for advice**. Or if you have **COPD** and are known to the Community Respiratory Team please ring them for advice or review.

Rest at night – If your breathing feels more difficult lying flat in bed try increasing the amount of pillows you use. Try 1 or 2 more pillows so your head and shoulders are more raised. Or if you have 4 – 5 pillows you can position them in the bed so they form an armchair and you can be in a sitting position to help you breathe easier.

Breathing exercise – if you feel short of breath, anxious or frightened try a simple breathing exercise on repeat and it will help you feel calm. You can practice this whenever you want: **Visualise smelling a flower** – breathe in through your nose. **Then blowing out a candle** – blow out through your mouth.

Fluids: it is important to find a balance – think of yourself as a spirit level! The diuretics are removing the excess fluid from your body but you also need to drink fluids so you don't feel really dry in the mouth. If you feel dizzy or light-headed when you go from sitting to standing up, try sitting down and drink a glass of water before standing up again.

Diet: it is important to reduce the amount of salt in your diet as it can make you retain water. Also avoid the use of LoSalt as this contains high levels of potassium.

Reduced appetite: If you have a poor appetite, try eating as much or as little of whatever you want. Try to have small frequent meals and snacks. If you are missing salt try adding pepper or herbs to give food more flavour.

Support: If you have any questions or are unsure about any of the self-management advice, please telephone your doctor or nurse for advice.