

Living with Congestive Heart Failure

Taking care of yourself when you're sick

Being sick can make your heart failure harder to control. Even if you don't feel well, it's important to follow your treatment plan. Know what's normal for you, so you can be aware of changes you might experience when you're sick.

Here are some steps you can take to keep your symptoms under control and help you get better as soon as possible.

Take your heart failure medicine

If you take medicine to manage your heart failure, such as Lasix, ask your doctor about how to adjust your medicine when you're sick. **Do not change your dose before talking to your doctor.**

Medicines to avoid

Many people take over-the-counter medicines to make them feel better when they're sick. However, many medicines contain substances that can make your heart failure worse. Others may interact with your heart failure medicine so it doesn't work properly. Check the label on all over-the-counter medicines before taking them and look for added sodium or alcohol. These can make your heart failure worse.

Do not take the following medicines:

- Anti-inflammatory drugs, including non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil), Aleve and Motrin
- Effervescent medicines, such as Alka-Seltzer (these contain sodium)

Talk with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medicines for coughs, colds, or flu. Decongestants that contain pseudoephedrine, ephedrine, or phenylephrine, such as Sudafed and Afrin nose spray, can increase your heart rate.

Relieve your symptoms

There are simple home treatments that may help you feel better. For fever and aches, try acetaminophen (Tylenol) unless your doctor has told you not to take it. Ease a cough or sore throat by sucking on hard candies to keep your throat moist. Apply a warm wash cloth over your face for sinus pain, and breathe warm, moist air to relieve congestion.

Keep track of liquids

You will need to drink plenty of liquids to stay hydrated. But drinking too much can make your heart failure symptoms worse. Follow your normal plan for how much liquid you can drink each day.

Your doctor may adjust the amount of liquid you can have when you're sick if you're throwing up or have diarrhea.

Do not drink or substitute rehydration or electrolyte beverages for your normal liquids. These contain too much sodium and can cause worsening of your heart failure symptoms. Examples include Pedialyte and sports drinks such as Gatorade, Powerade and Rehydrate.

Keep your body fueled

Bodies need fuel to recover from illness or injury. Follow your normal meal plan as closely as possible. Remember to limit your sodium intake. For an upset stomach, try sodium-free saltine crackers or small portions of low-sodium soups.

If you have diarrhea, or are throwing up, you might need to drink only clear liquids for the first 24 hours. After that, try adding other liquids (not clear) and soft foods that are easier to digest.

When to call your doctor

These are the signs that your heart failure is getting worse. Call your primary care doctor or the Consulting Nurse Service if you:

- Are more short of breath than usual when being active, or sitting, resting, or lying down.
- Are coughing more.
- Have more chest pain or heart palpitations than usual.
- Have swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, or stomach.
- Gain 2 to 3 pounds overnight, or 5 pounds in one week.
- Lose your appetite.
- Have to sit up in bed or use extra pillows so you can sleep.
- Have any other signs that make you think your condition is getting worse.

The **Consulting Nurse Service** is available to Kaiser Permanente members who have medical questions or concerns. Call 24 hours a day: toll-free 1-800-297-6877