

Heart Failure: Preparing for Discharge

When you are ready to be discharged from the hospital make sure you understand all the steps you need to take to manage your heart failure at home.

Before you leave the hospital, a member of your healthcare team will meet with you to go over your discharge information.

Your healthcare team will give you a written copy of these instructions.

This is the information you need right now to begin managing your heart failure. It will also include the name of the person you should contact if you have questions, and what to do in case of an emergency.

It will help to have a family member or friend with you to help remember the information and help ask any questions you still have.

While your instructions will be specific to you, there are general guidelines that everyone should follow.

Discharge instructions include: your follow-up appointment information; monitoring your symptoms; your medications; nutrition goals, particularly sodium guidelines; smoking cessation information, if necessary; physical activity guidelines; and what to do if your symptoms get worse.

Have a follow-up appointment scheduled before you leave the hospital. Make sure you know the date, time, and location of the appointment.

Watch for any changes in your symptoms, so you can get help.

Symptoms of worsening heart failure include: sudden weight gain, especially a gain of 2 or more pounds in a 24-hour period; increase in edema or swelling in the legs, ankles, feet, or waist; increase in shortness of breath; a new cough; worsening fatigue; increased heart rate; and increased thirst.

If any of your symptoms increase, or you notice any new symptoms, add them to your log and let your healthcare provider know immediately.

Your healthcare provider will also go over any medications you have been prescribed,

These may be different from the medications you were taking before you were admitted to the hospital.

You will most likely be prescribed several medications.

Make sure you know what you will be taking and understand what each is for.

Your discharge instructions will also include your nutrition goals, particularly your daily sodium and fluid intake guidelines.

The American Heart Association recommends limiting your total sodium to about 1,500 mg a day. Your healthcare team will discuss with you the amount of sodium you are allowed per day.

Talk to your healthcare provider for ideas on changes you can make in your diet to meet this goal.

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If you smoke, you **MUST** quit. If you continue to use tobacco, you are at a greater risk for heart attack, stroke, and further heart damage.

And smoking damages your lungs, which can make your symptoms of heart failure, like shortness of breath and fatigue, worse.

If you haven't already done so, schedule a meeting with your healthcare provider to go over ways to quit smoking.

Your discharge instructions will also include physical activity guidelines.

Staying active is one of the best things you can do for your heart health. And this is still true when you have heart failure.

Your healthcare provider may recommend you attend cardiac rehabilitation to help get you active and strengthen your heart.

This is also a good time to ask about support groups. Many hospitals have support groups for heart failure patients, and there are also online groups.

You can join the American Heart Association's Support Network at supportnetwork.heart.org.

Support groups can be an important part of your heart failure care.

You are ready to leave the hospital and go home. Follow your discharge instructions carefully every day in order to manage your heart failure, control your symptoms and avoid a return trip to the hospital.