

Living with Heart Failure

*This guide contains important information about Heart Failure. It contains key facts and instructions. Please keep this document and your “**Heart Failure Management Plan**” current and someplace where you and your family can easily get to it.*

What is Heart Failure?

- In its simplest form, Heart Failure is an inability of your heart to pump blood to vital organs appropriately. Heart Failure can be caused by many things, including heart attacks, valvular disease, and other disorders that put unusual stress on your heart.
- When the heart does not work well, fluid backs up in various parts of your body, including your lungs, abdominal organs and legs. This increase in fluid is what leads to most of the symptoms.

What are the symptoms of heart failure?

- Problems with breathing
 - Shortness of breath
 - Cough
 - Blood in your sputum
- Excess fluid
 - Swelling of ankles or feet
 - Abdominal swelling
- General symptoms
 - Fatigue
 - Lightheadedness
 - Nausea
 - Lack of appetite
- Sometimes little problems become worse if you don't take care of them early. It's better to ask if you are not sure what to do or what something means.

What symptoms should I report?

The enclosed **Heart Failure Daily Management Plan** will tell you what symptoms you should report and to whom.

What is my job as a patient?

- Learn about your disease. The more you know, the better you will do. CIGNA Medical group (along with your care team) offers a variety of written information, classes, and online resources to help you learn about the causes, symptoms, and treatment of heart failure in more detail.
- Take an active role in your care.
- Listed below are specific things you need to be responsible for
 - Know your medicines and take them exactly as they are prescribed.
 - Don't skip dosages.
 - Report unwanted medication side effects promptly
 - Remember that any other medications (including over the counter or health aids) may affect your heart medicines or your disease.
 - Included with this document is a very important place to list all your medicines. Please keep it current! If any doctor changes your medicines or dosages, please ask them to write the changes in your list (including medicines that are stopped).
 - Keep track of your daily weight. Along with how you feel, weight gain is often the earliest sign that you are in trouble. Weigh yourself daily at about the same time and about the same way
 - Weigh yourself on a reliable, easy-to-read scale. If you can't see your scale readings, please contact your team.
 - Weigh yourself without clothes, after you urinate
 - Keep a daily written record of your weight. For your convenience, we can supply you with forms to use for this.
 - Keep track of your symptoms. We have included more information on symptoms and a quick guide that tells you how to manage what we call a "Heart Failure Daily Management Plan".

What is my Care Team?

Your care team is made up of your doctor and others he/she feels are important to your care. Other members of the team might include:

- Your doctor's back office nurse or front office help
- A Case Manager or Care Coordinator—an RN who specializes in disease management and community resources
- An educator who teaches disease management.
- A specialist in heart care. In some cases, your primary doctor for your condition may be a cardiologist instead of your PCP.

What are the responsibilities of my Care Team?

You should expect your care team to respond to your needs. They should:

- Give you guidelines to keep you healthy.
- Tell you what to do if you are sick.
- Identify the best person to contact if you don't feel well.
- Be available quickly, by phone or in person.
- In some circumstances, they will decide if you need a specialist or special education.
- They may call you regularly to check on you. If so, they will set up a schedule for you. If you don't hear from them, make sure they hear from you.
- Some of you may be part of a program that monitors your condition using special home equipment. You will be notified of how this works.

What does my Care Team need to know?

In general, your team needs to know when you don't feel well and when certain measurements indicate you might be getting into trouble. They also want to know that you are taking your medicines correctly. The most common things they will track include:

- Your weight
- Your symptoms
- Your pulse
- In some circumstances, the amount of oxygen in your blood
- Depending on your medicines, your team may want you to get regular lab tests.

This is all part of a plan of care that can be adjusted to your condition.

What else can I do to help?

Your care plan will include recommendations that depend on the severity of your condition or your recent state of health.

- Watch your fluid intake. This includes all liquids—even those found in food.
- Watch your salt. Excess salt counteracts some of the most important medicines prescribed for HF and may put you at risk of getting worse.
- Keep your weight in good control. Extra weight means extra work for your heart.
- Exercise according to your care team's instructions.
- Sometimes planned rest is prescribed by your care team.
- Don't smoke! Smoking, even a few cigarettes a day, puts a high level of strain on your heart and your lungs, and causes changes that make it much more difficult to control your blood pressure.
- **Get your flu shot and pneumonia vaccines according to the recommended schedules.**
- Be concerned about your disease, but don't be paralyzed by it. In most circumstances, you can lead an active and full life if your HF is properly controlled.

What if I run out of medicines?

Medicines, along with fluid and salt restriction, are very important in your treatment, and missing even a few doses of some medicines may make a big difference in your condition.

- It is always better to ask for refills on your prescriptions ahead of time so you don't run out—usually a week before you take your last pill.
- If you do run out, call the office as soon as possible. If you run out of a medicine you are supposed to take after the office is closed, it is best to contact the doctor or nurse on call. They can help you decide how important the medicine is at that moment.
- If you can't afford to buy your medicine, please let us know. Sometimes we can identify less expensive alternatives or suggest special programs that will help you acquire your medicines.

How do I keep track of my medicines?

- Keeping track of your medicines may be a challenge. Please ask us about pill organizers and other tips for keeping track of medications.
- Take your medicines on a regular schedule—it helps you to remember to take them.
- Remember to keep an up to date list of your medicines.

What if I don't remember what I took?

Call your office. Some medicines are not as critical as others. Other medicines are more dangerous if taken in excess than not taken at all. Your team can tell you what to do.

What is a “Heart Failure Daily Management Plan?”

Your heart failure daily management plan is a set of instructions that tells you what to do if you are not feeling well, regardless of the cause. Your health management plan outlines who you should contact, what information you should have available, and how soon you need to call. The plan outlines very important information that helps you decide if you are having a sick day and what you should do.

What color is my day?

We sometimes use simple tools to help us communicate more easily. One scheme is to use colors to describe the kind of day you are having. This allows you to decide whether to trigger your health management plan, and allows us to determine what we have to do to make you better. The color of your day can be categorized using green, yellow and red. Your health management plan will tell you exactly what the colors mean.

