How to live a more active, happier and healthier life
WHY IS THIS SELF-CARE GUIDE IMPORTANT?

This Visiting Nurse Service of New York’s Self-Care Guidebook was developed to help you and your family understand and manage heart failure so you can live a more active, happier, and healthier life.

The Visiting Nurse Service of New York created a specialized program for our patients with heart failure. Our goal is to help you manage your condition.

Our guidebook is based on the most up-to-date research and our years of experience caring for people with heart failure.

On our first home care visit to you, your VNSNY nurse or therapist will perform a complete assessment and determine the services that are best for you. Depending on the individualized plan we develop with you, home care services may include nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, social work, and a home health aide.

HOW TO USE THIS SELF-CARE GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook is divided into short chapters. Together with your VNSNY nurse and/or therapist, you can review one chapter at a time. If you prefer, you may read this guidebook on your own and write down any questions or concerns you have so you can discuss them with your nurse, therapist or doctor.

What You Can Do

By understanding how to use this Self-Care Guidebook and working with your VNSNY home care team, you can learn how to manage your heart failure and live a fuller, more comfortable life. Some of the things you can do to manage your heart failure include:

• Learn how heart failure affects your body. This will help you learn how to better take care of yourself.

• Make some changes in how you eat and live to help your heart.

• Take the medications prescribed by your doctor. This will help your heart work better and keep your heart failure from getting worse.

• Learn to pay attention to your body and how you feel. If you notice symptoms, report them right away. This will help your doctor and nurse provide the best treatment for you.
WHAT IS HEART FAILURE?

Heart failure means your heart is not pumping as well as it does in people with normal heart function. It does not mean the heart has stopped working completely.

Common Symptoms of Heart Failure

- Feeling weak or becoming fatigued easily
- Shortness of breath and wheezing
- Difficulty breathing when lying flat
- Swelling in the hands, feet, abdomen, or ankles
- Frequent urination at night
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Cough
- Trouble concentrating or confusion

These symptoms become worse as heart failure progresses. If you can control these symptoms, you may be able to prevent your heart failure from getting worse.

How the Heart Works

The heart is a muscle that pumps blood throughout the body.

The heart is divided into four chambers that are separated by valves: right atria, right ventricle, left atria, left ventricle.

Oxygen-rich blood moves through the left side of the heart, passing to all other parts of the body.

Oxygen-poor blood is pumped through the right side of the heart to the lungs. In the lungs, the blood again becomes rich with oxygen.

What Blood Pressure Measures

The Two Stages of a Heartbeat

1. SYSTOLE: The right and left atria relax and fill with blood that enters the heart. At the same time, the ventricles squeeze, pumping blood from the heart to the lungs and body.

2. DIASTOLE: The atria squeeze, sending blood into the ventricles. The ventricles relax to take in this blood.

BLOOD PRESSURE = Systole / Diastole

Heart failure can make it harder to do things that used to be easy, such as climbing stairs.
RISK FACTORS FOR HEART FAILURE

Heart failure is caused by damage to the heart muscle. The heart is not pumping as well as it should. This damage is often caused by another form of heart disease or heart condition. Some risk factors for heart failure are uncontrollable and some are controllable.

Check ☑ any of the risk factors you have.

In this guide, you will learn how to manage your heart failure to help prevent your heart failure from getting worse.

Uncontrollable Risk Factors
- Increased age
- Male sex (gender)
- Heredity (including race)

Controllable Risk Factors
- Exposure to toxins (excessive alcohol, tobacco smoke)
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity/overweight
- Diabetes mellitus
- Stress

WHEN YOU HAVE HEART FAILURE

When you have heart failure, the heart is not pumping enough blood with each beat. There are two types of heart failure: diastolic and systolic. It is common to have both. In each type of heart failure, the ability to pump blood is reduced.

DIASTOLIC HEART FAILURE

The heart walls become stiff or thickened, and do not relax as well between heart beats. This keeps the ventricles from filling completely with blood. It prevents the heart from pumping enough blood to the lungs and body.

When your heart is pumping out less blood with each beat, fluid can back up into the lungs and throughout the body. This results in parts of the body not getting enough oxygen-rich blood. This can lead to the symptoms of heart failure.

SYSTOLIC HEART FAILURE

The heart muscle becomes weak and enlarges. When the ventricles squeeze, they can’t pump enough blood out of the heart because of their weakened condition.

What is Ejection Fraction (EF)?

EF measures how much blood the heart pumps out (ejicts). This is a measure to help diagnose heart failure. A normal EF is around 50% or more.

Ask your doctor for your Ejection Fraction.

My Ejection Fraction is ____________ Date: ____________
How Does My Doctor Know I Have Heart Failure?

Health History and Physical Exam

Your doctor will examine you, ask questions, and run tests when evaluating your heart. Your medical history is very important. This includes your medical conditions, past operations, and medications that you are taking.

Diagnosis of Heart Failure

Along with the medical history and physical exam, your doctor will also order other tests. These may include:

- **Chest X-Ray:** Shows if there is fluid in your lungs and an enlargement of the heart.
- **Electrocardiogram (ECG):** Records the electrical signals that pass through your heart. The doctor can see if there are any problems with your heart’s rhythm.
- **Echocardiogram:** Uses ultrasound waves that show the structure and movement of the heart. The doctor can see how well your heart pumps, the thickness of the heart walls, and any heart valve problems.
- **Stress Test:** Reveals how your heart responds to activity or exercise. This may be done on a treadmill or stationary bike. A stress test may also be performed by injecting a medication that affects the heart in the same manner as exercise.
- **Holter Monitor:** A portable device that is connected to the chest. It detects abnormal heartbeats or changes in the heart’s rhythm. It can be worn for several hours or days.
- **Cardiac Catheterization:** Assesses heart function; pictures are taken of the blood vessels that bring blood to the heart, allowing blocked blood vessels to be detected.

How Does My Doctor Know I Have Heart Failure?

Once heart failure is diagnosed, there are many ways it can be treated and controlled. Controlling heart failure can result in improved health and well-being.

This guide is designed to help you understand your role in keeping your heart failure well-controlled at home while minimizing the need to go to a hospital for emergency care.

The 5 Key Steps to Managing Your Heart Failure

1. **Take your medications as prescribed.**
2. **Eat heart healthy food;** follow your prescribed low-sodium, low-fat, low cholesterol diet.
3. **Weigh yourself daily.** Take action right away if your weight goes up.
4. **Monitor yourself for symptoms.** Take action right away when they occur.
5. **See your doctor/nurse regularly.**

Additional steps to manage your heart failure include:

- Quit smoking
- Stay active
- Reduce stress
GOALS

My Goal:

Set down a goal that you think you can meet. Remember, this is your goal.

_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________

My Primary Goal: Write down the goal that is most important to you.

_______________________________________________________________________________

On the scale below, what number best describes how important it is for you to reach your goal?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL  FAIRLY IMPORTANT  VERY IMPORTANT

On the scale below, what number best describes how confident you are that you will reach your goal?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
NOT CONFIDENT AT ALL  FAIRLY CONFIDENT  VERY CONFIDENT

If you don't feel very confident, what would help increase your confidence?

_______________________________________________________________________________
# COMMON MEDICATIONS FOR HEART FAILURE*

This table is a summary of common heart failure medications, how they work and possible side effects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF MEDICATION</th>
<th>HOW THEY WORK &amp; GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS</th>
<th>MEDICATION</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS &amp; PRECAUTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors</td>
<td>• Lower blood pressure • Decrease strain on the heart • Improve blood flow</td>
<td>Capoten (Capoten®) □ Lisinopril (Prinivil, Zestril®) □ Enalapril ( Vasotec®) □ Quinapril (Accupril®) □ Fosinopril ( Monopril®) Other □</td>
<td>Low blood pressure (may make you dizzy or lightheaded) • Kidney problems • Too much potassium in the body • Stomach pain □</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angiotensin receptor blocker (ARB)</td>
<td>• Blocks certain chemicals and relaxes blood vessels • Lowers blood pressure • Decreases strain on the heart</td>
<td>Candesartan (Atacand®) □ Eprosartan (Teveten®) □ Irbesartan (Avapro®) □ Losartan (Cozaar®) □ Telmisartan (Micardis®) □ Valsartan ( Diovan®) Other □</td>
<td>Low blood pressure (may make you dizzy or lightheaded) • Kidney problems • Too much potassium in the body • Stomach pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta-Blocker</td>
<td>• Blocks certain chemicals (stress hormones) made by the body that make heart failure worse • Keeps the heart rate slow and regular</td>
<td>Atenolol (Tenormin®) □ Metoprolol (Lopressor®) □ Bisoprolol (Zebeta®) □ Metoprolol Succinate (Toprol XL) □ Carvedilol (Coreg®) Other □</td>
<td>• Dizziness □ Fatigue □ Low heart rate □ Trouble sleeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diuretic (Water Pill)</td>
<td>• Reduces the amount of fluid buildup in the body • Reduces swelling in the tissues</td>
<td>Bumetanide (Bumex®) □ Furosemide (Lasix®) □ Hydrochlorothiazide (Hydrodiuril®) □ Metolazone (Zaroxolyn®) □</td>
<td>Frequent urination • Excessive loss of potassium and fluid from the body • Low blood pressure (may make you dizzy or lightheaded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldosterone Antagonist</td>
<td>• Alters chemicals (stress hormones) that can damage the heart • Decreases the strain on the heart</td>
<td>Eplerenone (Inspra®) □ Spironolactone (Aldactone®)</td>
<td>Kidney problems □ Too much potassium in the body □ Low blood pressure (may make you dizzy or lightheaded) □ Tender or enlarged breasts (male and female) □ Irregular menstrual periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digoxin</td>
<td>• Slows and strengthens the heart beat • Allows more oxygen-rich blood to travel to the body</td>
<td>Digoxin (Lanoxin®) Other □</td>
<td>Vision changes - blurred or colored vision □ Heart palpitations or skipped beats □ Loss of appetite □ Stomach pains □ Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydralazine and Nitrate</td>
<td>• Relaxes blood vessels and reduces the workload of the heart. • Used for patients who cannot take an ACE or an ARB, or for patients who need an extra medication to control symptoms of heart failure.</td>
<td>Hydralazine □ Nitroglycerin □ Isosorbide dinitrate (Isordil®)</td>
<td>Low blood pressure (may make you dizzy or lightheaded) □ Headache □ Nausea/vomiting/diarrhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statins</td>
<td>• Lower total cholesterol levels in the blood</td>
<td>Atorvastatin (Lipitor®) □ Rosuvastatin (Crestor®) □ Simvastatin (Zocor®)</td>
<td>Stomach pain □ Diarrhea/constipation □ Muscle aches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol-Absorption Inhibitor</td>
<td>• Lowers cholesterol and triglyceride levels by decreasing the amount of cholesterol absorbed from food</td>
<td>Ezetimibe (Zetia®)</td>
<td>Infection □ Joint pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other cholesterol-lowering medications</td>
<td>• Lower triglyceride levels and also help to increase “good cholesterol”</td>
<td>Niacin (Niaspan®)</td>
<td>Flushing □ Dizziness □ Chills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-coagulant (blood thinners)</td>
<td>• Prevent blood clots from forming in the vessels</td>
<td>Warfarin Sodium (Coumadin®)</td>
<td>Upset stomach □ Vomiting □ Stomach pain □ Bleeding (gums, nosebleeds) □ Bleeding in lung □ Dark, tarry stools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antiplatelet (blood thinners)</td>
<td>• Prevent blood clots from forming in the vessels.</td>
<td>Plavix □ Aspirin</td>
<td>Nausea/diarrhea □ Stomach pain □ Rash □ Upset stomach □ Bleeding/bruiseing □ Itching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potassium</td>
<td>• Necessary for the heart, kidneys, muscles, nerves and digestive system to work properly. • Some diuretics (water pills) will make you lose potassium. • Potassium must be diluted in at least one-half glass (4 ounces) of water or juice to reduce its possible stomach-irritating or laxative effect.</td>
<td>K-Dur® □ Klor-Con® □ Micro-K* □ Slow-K*</td>
<td>Upset stomach □ Nausea/vomiting □ Abdominal discomfort □ High Potassium Level can cause: □ Weakness □ Change in pulse □ Irritability □ Abnormal sensation □ Low Potassium Level can cause: □ Fatigue □ Confusion □ Muscle cramps □ Muscle weakness □ Change in pulse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This table is not a complete list of available medications and does not endorse any type or brand of medication. It also does not include all actions, adverse reactions, precautions, side effects, or interactions for these medications. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist about the possible side effects and drug or food interactions of any medication you use. This should not be used as a substitution for reading the instructions included with your medications or given by your pharmacist.

This table is a summary of common heart failure medications, how they work and possible side effects.
Heart failure can be controlled with medications. Following the tips below will help you manage your medications. Check ☑ all the tips you already follow, and those tips that you are ready to begin following.

☐   Read the instructions about your medications.

☐   Ask your nurse, doctor, or pharmacist about possible side effects of all your medications.

☐    Discuss with your doctor before you stop or start any medications. This includes over-the-counter medications.

☐   Keep an up-to-date list of all medications that you are taking. Include how much and how often.

☐   Carry your medication list with you in your purse or wallet just in case of an emergency.

☐    Keep your medications in their original bottles or containers. The original containers have the correct label and instructions. Ask your VNSNY nurse about using a pillbox.

☐    Check the expiration date on all of your medications. Do not use any medications after they expire.

☐    When you travel, make sure you have extra medications. Keep your medications with you in your carry-on luggage.

**HOW TO TAKE YOUR PULSE**

Your pulse rate is the number of times your heart beats in one minute. A normal resting heart beats about 60 to 100 times per minute. Check with your nurse or doctor for your normal range. Some medications (such as Digoxin and high blood pressure medications) can lower your pulse rate. Therefore, your doctor may want you to check your pulse before you take certain medications.

**How do I take my pulse?**

- Sit quietly for five minutes before you begin.
- Gently place two or three fingers on your wrist just below your thumb (do not press too hard). If you need help, ask your VNSNY nurse.
- Never use your thumb to take your pulse. This is because your thumb has its own pulse.
- Use a clock or watch with a second hand to time the number of beats you feel in one minute.
- Count the number of beats for 60 seconds (or 30 seconds and multiply by 2). This number is your pulse rate.

**MANAGING YOUR MEDICATIONS**

Heart failure can be controlled with medications. Following the tips below will help you manage your medications. Check ☑ all the tips you already follow, and those tips that you are ready to begin following.

☐   Read the instructions about your medications.

☐   Ask your nurse, doctor, or pharmacist about possible side effects of all your medications.

☐    Discuss with your doctor before you stop or start any medications. This includes over-the-counter medications.

☐   Keep an up-to-date list of all medications that you are taking. Include how much and how often.

☐   Carry your medication list with you in your purse or wallet just in case of an emergency.
Eat a Low-Sodium (Low-Salt) Diet

HEART FAILURE PATIENTS ARE OFTEN TOLD TO LIMIT SODIUM

Sodium (salt) is found in table salt, many foods, drinks, and medicines. Sodium can cause your body to hold on to more fluid (water) than is needed. The fluid buildup in the body makes the heart work harder. The increased fluid can also make your blood pressure rise. This increase in fluid may also cause shortness of breath and weight gain.

A certain amount of sodium is needed by your body. The average diet provides more than enough sodium, even if table salt is not added to food.

Cutting down on excess sodium or salt is a very important way to keep your heart failure under control.

SOME STEPS TO CUT DOWN ON SODIUM:

- Do not add salt to food.
- Remove the salt shaker from your table.
- Read food labels for sodium content and avoid foods high in sodium.
- Avoid processed and fast foods.

EATING A HEART-HEALTHY DIET

Another way to manage heart failure is through your diet.

Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet

A heart-healthy diet includes a balance of protein (meat/fish/poultry/beans), low-fat dairy products, fruits, vegetables, and grains. It is also low in sodium and low in fat. Good food is like medicine—it can heal and repair your body to make you stronger!

Maintain a Healthy Weight to Keep Your Heart Strong

OVERWEIGHT

Being overweight increases the work your heart does. It also raises your risks for many other health problems. Being overweight can make the symptoms of heart failure worse. This results in an increase in shortness of breath and increased tiredness after activity.

Cutting out some foods, like soft drinks, packaged cakes and cookies, alcohol, and salty snacks can help.

UNDERWEIGHT

If you are not active, your muscles, including your heart muscle, get weaker. To rebuild muscles, you need protein from low-fat dairy products, lean meat, chicken, fish and vitamins and minerals from fruits and grains.

If you are overweight or underweight, work with your nutritionist or doctor to set safe eating and weight-loss goals.
READ FOOD LABELS FOR SODIUM

Find out where sodium is hidden in food.

Do you know that most of the sodium we eat—almost 80%—comes from packaged, processed, store-bought food, restaurant meals, and fast foods?

Check food labels before you buy. Choose products with less sodium.

**Chicken Soup with Rice**

![Image of Chicken Soup with Rice]

This can contains two servings.

- The food label at left shows that this can of chicken and rice soup has 870 mg of sodium per serving.
- Most people should eat no more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day.
- Check the serving size and the number of servings in a container.

**Nutrition Facts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount Per Serving</th>
<th>% Daily Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calories 100</td>
<td>2% Daily Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calories from Fat 15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Fat 1.5g</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturated Fat 0g</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans Fat 0g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol 1.5mg</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium 870mg</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Carbohydrate 15g</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietary Fiber 1g</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugars 1g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein 6g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SODIUM IN CANNED OR PROCESSED FOODS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOOD</th>
<th>SERVING SIZE</th>
<th>RANGE OF SODIUM (Mg) Per Serving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canned Soup</td>
<td>1 cup</td>
<td>280–980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned Vegetables</td>
<td>½ cup</td>
<td>10–650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen Cheese Pizza</td>
<td>1 slice (4 ounces)</td>
<td>375–780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen Meals</td>
<td>6–10 ounces</td>
<td>60–1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salad Dressing</td>
<td>2 tablespoons</td>
<td>75–620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salsa</td>
<td>2 tablespoons</td>
<td>105–250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potato Chips</td>
<td>1 ounce</td>
<td>90–380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretzels</td>
<td>1 ounce</td>
<td>75–610</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By choosing your frozen meal wisely, you can cut out 1040 mg of sodium! READ LABELS

**Test Your Label-Reading Knowledge**

How much sodium is in this entire can of soup?

**SMART SHOPPING TIPS**

- Fresh foods like vegetables, fruits, and meats, usually have less salt than canned or processed foods.
- Canned items, such as beans and soup broth, can be very high in salt. Look for "low-sodium" or "no-salt-added" items.
- Processed foods marketed as "healthy" may have a lot of sodium. Always check the label.
Eating a Low-Fat Diet

To protect your heart cut down on foods high in cholesterol and certain other fats that clog your blood vessels. This will also help decrease your chance of having a heart attack or stroke.

**CHOOSE FATS WISELY**

Your body needs some fats to stay healthy. However, eating too much of some types of fat is bad for your heart. Try to choose the healthier fats and avoid unhealthy fats (see chart below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Fat</th>
<th>CHOOSE</th>
<th>LIMIT</th>
<th>AVOID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsaturated Fats (good fats)</td>
<td>• Nuts, seeds</td>
<td>• Saturated Fats (Bad Fats)</td>
<td>Trans Fats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>• Beef, pork, egg yolks, organ meat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avocados</td>
<td>• Ice cream, whole milk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive and canola oils</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where It Is Found</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal products, for example:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-fat dairy, for example:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What You Should Do</td>
<td>• Try to use unsaturated fats when possible.</td>
<td>• Eat as little saturated fat as you can.</td>
<td>• Avoid foods with trans fat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, use olive oil on your vegetables instead of butter.</td>
<td>• To cut down, choose low-fat or fat-free milk products, and lean meats, chicken or fish.</td>
<td>• Check label for and avoid “hydrogenated oils” or “partially hydrogenated oils.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is Cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fatty, wax-like substance found in the bloodstream and your body’s cells. Your body needs some cholesterol to stay healthy. Too much cholesterol can clog your blood vessels and make heart failure worse. Cholesterol is absorbed into the blood from foods. One way to lower your cholesterol is to cut down on the amount of cholesterol you eat. In some cases, your doctor may also prescribe medications to lower your cholesterol.

ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER ABOUT YOUR CHOLESTEROL LEVELS.

A CHOLESTEROL PROFILE INCLUDES:

HEALTHY VALUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cholesterol</th>
<th>Below 200 mg/dl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LDL (bad) cholesterol</td>
<td>Below 100 mg/dl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDL (good) cholesterol</td>
<td>35 to 55 mg/dl or more (the higher the better)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triglycerides</td>
<td>Below 150 mg/dl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Triglycerides are another fat found in your blood. High triglyceride levels in your blood are not good for your heart. Sugary foods, saturated fats, carbohydrates (starches) and alcohol can raise triglyceride levels.

How to Cut Down on Fat and Cholesterol in Meals

Just as you are learning to cook with less salt you can also learn to cook with less fat and cholesterol. Foods may taste different at first, but in time you will enjoy the new taste. Check ☐ any changes you are ready to make:

☐ Bake, steam, microwave, or broil foods; avoid frying.
☐ Before cooking, trim fat and remove skin from chicken or other poultry.
☐ Choose lean cuts of meat.
☐ After cooking, chill soups and stews and skim off fat before reheating and serving.
☐ Try using half as much cheese as the recipe calls for, or even less. Choose dairy products with 0-1% fat.
☐ Cook with canola oil, olive oil, or trans-fat free margarine instead of butter or regular margarine.
☐ Remember that cheeses and low-fat foods can be high in sodium, so check the label and buy low-sodium foods.

Test Your Label-Reading Skills

1. In one cup of the above food, how many grams of “Total Fat” are in a serving?
2. How many grams of “Saturated Fat” per serving?
3. How many mg of “Cholesterol” per serving?

Read Food Labels for Fat and Cholesterol

HOW TO READ THIS FOOD LABEL

Serving Size/ Serving per Container —The information on the label only refers to one serving. (Note the number of servings per package.)

Total Fat — You need to limit the fat in your diet. “Low fat” is considered to be 3 grams or less of fat per serving.

Saturated Fat — The “bad fat”, you need to limit this type of fat. Low saturated fat is 1g or less per serving.

Cholesterol — Another type of fat you need to limit. Low cholesterol is 20 mg or less per serving.

*Percent Daily Values are based on daily needs and vary with other medical conditions, such as high cholesterol or heart failure.

Nutrition Facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serving Size 1 cup (228g)</th>
<th>Servings per Package 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount Per Serving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calories 260</td>
<td>Calories from Fat 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Fat 13g</td>
<td>% Daily Value 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturated Fat 5g</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol 30mg</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium 600mg</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Carbohydrate 31g</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietary Fiber 6g</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugars 5g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein 5g</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin A 4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vitamin C 2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calcium 15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iron 4%</td>
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Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calories: 2,000 2,500</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Fat Less than 85g 80g</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat Fat Less than 20g 25g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol Less than 300mg 300mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Carbohydrate 30g 375g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietary Fiber 25g 30g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calories per gram:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Institutes of Health; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
EAT A HIGH-FIBER DIET

Avoiding Constipation

Constipation is a common problem. It can mean it is difficult for you to have a bowel movement, or your bowel movements may be less frequent. Your stools may be very hard, making them so difficult to pass that you have to strain. When constipated, you may feel like you still need to have a bowel movement even after you’ve had one. Common causes of constipation include:

- Side effect of medications
- A diet low in fiber or high in fat
- Lack of exercise/inactivity
- Not enough fluids (water)
- Some illnesses
- Eating large amounts of dairy products

Check ☑ any changes you are ready to make:

☐ Eat 5 or more servings of fresh fruits and vegetables per day.
☐ Eat prunes and raisins or drink prune juice.
☐ Increase fiber (fresh fruits, vegetables, cereals and grains).
☐ Drink plenty of fluids—unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
☐ Limit caffeinated beverages and alcohol.
☐ Limit refined sugars and highly processed foods.
☐ Remain active.
☐ Decrease fat and dairy products.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about a stool softener. A stool softener could help prevent straining. You can buy an over-the-counter stool softener at your pharmacy.

WEIGH IN DAILY

Weighing yourself daily is recommended for people with heart failure. Rapid weight gain can be a sign that you are holding on to fluid (water). This may be a sign of heart failure. This may mean your treatment plan needs to change. Weigh yourself every day to know if your body is storing water.

Weighing Yourself

- Weigh yourself on the same scale every day. Make sure the numbers are easy to read. If you don’t have or can’t afford a scale, ask your VNSNY nurse or doctor for suggestions.
- Weigh yourself at the same time every day. The best time is when you wake up, after urinating and before eating.
- Weigh yourself wearing no clothes or the same clothes or towel every day.
- Find a good place to keep your scale, where it can stay without having to move it.
- Write down your weight every day. Record it on a calendar, on “My Symptom Tracker” (see pg. 28), or whatever you decide works for you. Just be sure to stick to it. Keep your weight chart and a pen near the scale. Have the record ready for your VNSNY nurse and bring it to your doctor visits.

Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, call your VNSNY nurse or doctor if you:
- Gain 3 lbs or more in one day
- Gain 5 lbs or more in seven days or less
My Symptom Tracker

This chart can be used to track your weight, blood pressure, and pulse every day. It can also be used to track symptoms or note other changes. Keep it on hand for your VNSNY nurse and bring it with you for follow-up appointments with your doctor. You may want to make extra copies of this chart before you fill it out for the first time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Daily Weight</th>
<th>Blood Pressure</th>
<th>Pulse</th>
<th>Breathlessness Rating</th>
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My Baseline Values

Weight:_________  Blood pressure:__________  Pulse:__________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fatigue Rating</th>
<th>Other (Blood Sugar)</th>
<th>Change in Symptoms/Notes (i.e. &quot;Too tired to shower this morning.&quot;)</th>
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WHAT IS A “HEART FAILURE SYMPTOM ACTION PLAN”?

A heart failure symptom action plan helps you to take the proper action based upon your heart failure signs and symptoms.

You may use the plan below or develop another plan with your nurse or doctor.

Reporting symptoms when they first start may keep you out of the hospital.

**GREEN ZONE SYMPTOMS**

**EXPERIENCING THESE SYMPTOMS MEANS YOU CAN GO ON WITH DAILY LIFE**

Your heart failure is in good control.
☐ You have no change in your symptoms.*
☐ You can do your normal activities.
☐ Your weight is stable.
*You may have some breathlessness and get tired easily but no more than usual.

**ACTION PLAN**

1. Take your medications as ordered.
2. Weigh yourself daily and write it down.
3. Follow your treatment, exercise and diet plans.

**YELLOW ZONE SYMPTOMS**

**EXPERIENCING THESE SYMPTOMS MEANS YOU SHOULD TAKE CAUTION IN YOUR DAILY LIFE**

Your symptoms are starting to worsen. You may have some or all of the following symptoms:
☐ Increased tiredness or less energy than usual
☐ Increased breathlessness
☐ Weight goes up 3 lbs in (1) day or 5 lbs or more in (7) or less days
☐ Increase number of pillows or use a chair to sleep
☐ Increase in “water” (fluid) in legs, feet, ankles, hands or abdomen
☐ Cough
☐ Unusual dreams

**ACTION PLAN**

1. Take your medications as ordered.
2. Weigh yourself daily and write it down.
3. Follow your treatment, exercise and diet plans.

**RED ZONE SYMPTOMS**

**EXPERIENCING THESE SYMPTOMS MEANS YOU MUST STOP YOUR DAILY LIFE**

*Your heart failure is worsening and you need to seek medical care immediately.

You may have some or all of the following symptoms:
☐ Sudden increase in shortness of breath that is not relieved by rest
☐ Chest pain that does not go away
☐ Increased difficulty talking and or slurred speech
☐ Skin, lips or fingernails turn grayish or blue in color
☐ Heartbeat or pulse is very fast or irregular
☐ Faintness, drowsiness or difficulty staying awake
☐ Sudden increase in restlessness, anxiety and/or agitation

**ACTION PLAN**

1. Stop your daily life.
2. Call 911 or have someone take you to the nearest emergency room.

It is important to know your symptoms of worsening heart failure. You may want to record them here.

**My Symptoms:**

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

1.  Call your doctor or VNSNY nurse to notify him or her of your symptoms and plan an appointment.
2.  Pace your activities and use energy-saving and relaxation techniques.
3.  Continue with your medications and take your “as-needed” medications.
4.  Make sure you are getting adequate nutrition.
5.  If you are using oxygen, be sure it is working properly and you are using the correct amount.
If you smoke, quitting smoking is the single most important step you can take to improve your overall health. Quitting reduces your chances of a heart attack and other health problems.

If you still smoke, talk to your doctor about quitting.

* If you do not smoke, skip to page 34.

Nicotine is a highly addictive drug. You may need to try a variety of methods to quit smoking. It may take several attempts before you quit for good.

Do not be discouraged if you have been unable to quit in the past. It is never too late to stop smoking. Most people have to try more than once before they quit for good.

**PRODUCTS THAT MAY HELP YOU QUIT SMOKING:**

- Nicotine replacement therapy
- Other medications, such as Bupropion (Zyban®) and Varenicline (Chantix®)

Before taking any medications, including over-the-counter nicotine replacements, discuss them with your doctor.

**Support Groups**

The more support you get the more likely that you will quit for good.

- Support groups can help smokers learn how to deal with cravings and withdrawal.
- The NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation offers free counseling and free medication at convenient locations throughout New York City. For more information about these programs, call the City of New York at 311.
People with heart failure may be more likely to develop respiratory infections.

**TIPS FOR PREVENTING RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS:**

- **Wash your hands often.** Most germs are spread through hand-to-mouth contact. Wash your hands with soap and warm water. Lather well for at least 15-20 seconds, then rinse well.
- **Get a flu shot yearly.** Be sure to receive the vaccine before the flu season begins.
- **Ask your doctor about getting the pneumonia vaccine.**
- **Avoid contact with anyone who has signs of a cold or flu.**
- **Watch for cold or flu symptoms.** Call your doctor as soon as you suspect you may be coming down with a cold or flu. Early treatment is key to avoiding complications. Your doctor may prescribe medications to control these symptoms and help you feel better.

**RELAXING YOUR MIND AND BODY**

Shortness of breath can make you feel anxious and even frightened. There are many relaxation techniques that help you deal with anxiety and breathe more easily. You may need to try a few techniques to find the best one for you.

Audio recordings for many relaxation techniques are available. You may find them helpful. You can usually buy them in bookstores or health food stores.

Relaxation techniques

Check ☑ any relaxation technique(s) you are ready to learn.

- ☐ **DEEP BREATHING**
  Deep abdominal breathing can help you relax: Breathe in through your nose deeply, pretending to smell your favorite flower. Then, with your lips in a pucker, pretend to blow out the candles on a birthday cake. If you are doing this exercise correctly, your abdomen should be rising and falling.

- ☐ **PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION**
  This technique involves contracting and relaxing muscle groups one at a time. Begin by contracting and relaxing your facial muscles. Feel the difference between a tense and relaxed muscle. Move all your muscles from head to toe until you have contracted and relaxed your whole body.

- ☐ **VISUALIZATION**
  This technique uses your imagination. Close your eyes and imagine a relaxing scene. It may be a beautiful beach or a mountaintop. Picture yourself in this setting. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? Focus on the scene for 10-15 minutes.

- ☐ **MEDITATION**
  To meditate, close your eyes. Breathe deeply into your abdomen and concentrate on a single calming thought, word or object. If you are having difficulty staying focused, try repeating a word or sound over and over.

  If you need help with these relaxation techniques, ask your VNSNY nurse or therapist.
SAVING YOUR ENERGY

With heart failure, you have less energy. Therefore, you need to know how to get things done with as little effort as possible. Your VNSNY therapist(s) will teach you ways to save energy and suggest equipment that can also help.

TIPS TO SAVING ENERGY:

Check ☑ any tips you’re ready to try.

☐ Do things slowly, while sitting, whenever possible.
   For example, if you are chopping vegetables, sit at a table instead of standing up in the kitchen.

☐ Prepare extra meals that can be frozen. On days that you are especially tired, you can just defrost a healthy, simple meal.

☐ Find simple ways to do chores. Keep frequently used items in easy reach. Use a small table or cart on wheels to move things.

☐ Wear clothes and shoes that can be put on easily. Sit when putting on clothing, socks or shoes.

☐ Take frequent rest periods, especially between activities, such as eating or bathing.

☐ Go outdoors when you feel your best. Avoid the outdoors in very high or low temperatures.

☐ Avoid shopping at busy times when lines are long.

☐ Use a shower chair while taking a shower. A hand-held shower and long-handled sponge may help with bathing.

☐ Keep mirrors low or use full-length mirrors, so you can sit down while combing your hair or putting on your clothes.

STAYING ACTIVE

The heart is a muscle that is strengthened with exercise. Regular exercise is important in managing your heart failure.

EXERCISING HAS MANY BENEFITS. HERE ARE SOME OF THEM:

- Raises energy level
- Improves cholesterol level
- Helps blood circulation
- Prevents and manages high blood pressure
- Helps manage stress
- Controls weight
- Strengthens muscles
- Improves sleep
- Relieves anxiety and depression
- Improves quality of life
- Lowers risk of early death

Talk with your doctor or VNSNY nurse or therapist to get an exercise program made just for you.

SAVING YOUR ENERGY

SIGNS OF OVEREXERTION

Stop exercising immediately and rest if you feel any of these symptoms:

☐ Chest pain or discomfort
☐ Aching in your arm, shoulders, neck, jaw or back
☐ Difficulty breathing
☐ A racing, pounding or skipping heartbeat
☐ Extreme tiredness
☐ Lightheadedness or dizziness
☐ Nausea or vomiting

Call your doctor if these symptoms don’t go away when you stop activity.

STAYING INTIMATE

If you have heart failure, it is natural for you and your partner to have concerns about sexual activity.

Ask your doctor if you need to take any special precautions before or during sexual activity.

Talk with your doctor or VNSNY nurse or therapist to get an exercise program made just for you.

Balancing physical activity with rest is important especially in more advanced stages of Heart Failure.

Aerobic exercise, like walking or swimming, is the best type of exercise for your heart.
CARDIAC REHABILITATION

It may be helpful to ask your doctor if a cardiac rehabilitation program is right for you.

This kind of program is often offered on an outpatient basis, in a hospital or medical center. Attendance is typically three sessions per week for several months.

CARDIAC REHABILITATION MAY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

☐ Monitoring your heart rate and blood pressure as you exercise. This shows how much exercise is best for your heart. It can help you feel more confident about how much you can do.

☐ Use of a treadmill, rowing machine, stationary bicycle or other pieces of equipment. You will be shown how to use the equipment safely to get the best results.

PLANNING IN ADVANCE

It is important for everyone to plan in advance for the end of life.

On admission to VNSNY Home Care, your VNSNY nurse or therapist will discuss advance care planning with you. Planning can help ensure that your wishes will be honored.

Do you have a health care proxy?

There is a copy of a health care proxy and an advanced care plan in your VNSNY Welcome Packet. Your VNSNY nurse or therapist can help you and your caregivers complete these forms with your beliefs and values in mind.

STAYING POSITIVE

Depression is common in people with an illness, such as heart failure. If depression is severe, it can greatly interfere with one's life.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION INCLUDE:

☐ Loss of interest in things you enjoy
☐ Feeling sad, or “blue” or down
☐ Feeling slowed down, having no energy, or feeling restless and unable to sit still
☐ Feeling worthless or guilty
☐ Eating more or less than usual and gaining or losing weight
☐ Not being able to sleep, or sleeping too much
☐ Problems focusing, thinking, remembering or making decisions
☐ Headaches, aches and pains, stomach problems
☐ Loss of sex drive
☐ Feeling negative, hopeless, anxious, or worried
☐ Feeling irritable or angry
☐ Thoughts of death or suicide

If you have two or more of the symptoms above, discuss your feelings with your VNSNY nurse or your doctor. Additional help may also be needed. Some people find support groups or medications helpful.

A social worker can help you find appropriate support groups and counseling.
Helpful Resources

**American Heart Association**
New York City Affiliate Office
www.americanheart.org
Tel: (212) 878-5900
Fax: (212) 878-5960

**My Pill Box**
(Help In Organizing Medications)
www.mypillbox.com

**Medicare Hotline**
800-633-4227

**Needy Meds**
(Help With Paying For Medication)
www.needymeds.org

**Heart Failure Society of America**
www.abouthf.org

**Aging with Dignity**
www.fivewishes.org
An Inside Look at a Healthier Heart:
A VNSNY Self–Care Guide