

# Your heart failure self-care plan

## The traffic light system



Weight stable in the morning



No new or worsening breathlessness



No new swelling. Feet and legs look normal for you



Physical activity is normal for you



**Excellent – keep up the good work!**



Sudden weight gain (of 2 kg (4-5 lbs) over 2 days without symptom change



New or worsening breathlessness



You need more pillows to sleep comfortably because you are breathless



Troublesome cough



Increased swelling in legs and ankles



Abdominal swelling



Worsening appetite



New or worsening dizziness

**Pay attention – use caution!**



Please contact your heart failure clinic or GP



You may need to see your doctor



You may need a change in medications



Breathlessness waking you at night



Breathlessness at rest



Sudden weight gain (of 2 kg (4-5 lbs) over 2 days) with worsening of symptoms



Coughing frothy sputum



Loss of consciousness or collapse (call an ambulance)



**Medical alert – warning!**

**WARNING! You need to be assessed today.**

Please contact your heart failure clinic or GP

# Quick guide to living with heart failure

Heart failure develops when the heart weakens and becomes less efficient and cannot pump blood around your body as well as it should. You can live well with heart failure once you know and understand the condition and its treatment. This

will help you to notice and report any changes in your symptoms. By working closely with your healthcare team, you can take control of your condition, avoid unnecessary hospital visits and live an active life.

## Managing your signs and symptoms Consult the traffic lights system overleaf

### Every day

- When you get up in the morning, weigh yourself after going to the toilet. Record your weight in your weight notebook or diary. Compare it to yesterday's weight. A sudden weight gain of 2kg/4-5lbs over 2 days is an early sign of fluid retention.
- Check your breathing is the same as normal.
- Check for swelling in your feet, ankles, legs and tummy.
- Take your medicines as directed.

### Exercise

Ideally you should exercise for 150 minutes every week in sessions of 10 minutes or more. Take it easy at the beginning and gradually increase what you are doing.

For tips and advice on physical activity, visit:  
[www.getirelandactive.ie](http://www.getirelandactive.ie), [www.getirelandwalking.ie](http://www.getirelandwalking.ie)  
[www.iscp.ie](http://www.iscp.ie)

### Alcohol

Alcohol is not forbidden if you have heart failure. However, the amount that each patient can drink will vary depending on each person's individual circumstances. Therefore, your nurse or doctor will discuss the amount of alcohol that is safe for you to drink.

### Smoking

If you are a smoker, quitting is one of the best things you can do for your health. Smoking makes your heart work harder. It reduces the amount of oxygen that your blood can carry and narrows the walls of your blood vessels.

Please speak to your nurse, doctor or pharmacist about quitting or call the National Smokers Quit line 1800 201 203 or log onto [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie)

### Managing your medicines

- It is very important to take your medicines at the right time and in the way your doctor has told you.
- Never stop taking your medicines without taking your doctor first.
- If you have trouble remembering to take your tablets, try the following tips:
  - Take your medicines at the same time every day.
  - Use special pill boxes that help you keep track of your medicines.
  - Ask your pharmacist to put your medicines into daily or weekly 'blister packs'.
  - Keep a 'medicine calendar' and make a note every time you take your dose.
  - Ask people close to you to remind you.
  - Put a sticker or reminder note on your medicine cabinet or fridge.

### Diet

- Avoid too much salt in your diet. Salt can make your body hold on to water (fluid retention), worsening your heart failure symptoms.
- If you are overweight, your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body. Losing weight may help reduce your symptoms of heart failure as well as reduce the risk of other health complications such as diabetes.

If you would like healthy eating advice, ask your dietitian, doctor or nurse or log on to [www.safefood.eu/Healthy-Eating](http://www.safefood.eu/Healthy-Eating)

### Get vaccinated

- Heart failure patients are strongly advised to get the annual flu vaccine and the pneumococcal vaccination from your GP.



To access online educational resources for heart failure, please log on to [www.heartbeattrust.ie](http://www.heartbeattrust.ie)

Email: [hello@heartbeattrust.ie](mailto:hello@heartbeattrust.ie)  
Registered charity: CHY 15938

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