

Your Heart, Your Mind, in Your Hands



A Self-Management Guide for Living Well with Heart Failure

**RE-FRAME your wellbeing:
Learning how to strengthen your
mental wellbeing and manage heart
failure with confidence.**

This resource is designed to help
patients develop healthy habits and
strategies to manage their wellbeing
and live better with heart failure.

 CCAER^{research}

archipel

Ensemble, Grand Fleuve / Ensemble, Grand Fleuve

 Great
RIVER
ONTARIO
HEALTH TEAM



ÉQUIPE SANTÉ
ONTARIO DU
Grand
FLEUVE

Kaniatarowanénhne Kaniatario Ata'karitéhtshera Raotinénra

 Santé
Bruyère
Health



INTERCONNECTOME
COEUR-CERVEAU
BRAIN-HEART
INTERCONNECTOME

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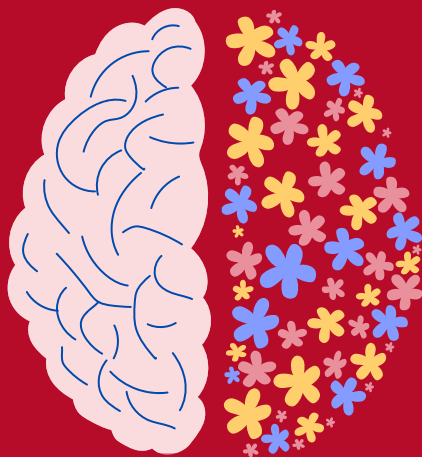
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Introduction to Mental Health and Self-Care in Heart Failure



Heart Failure Self-Management

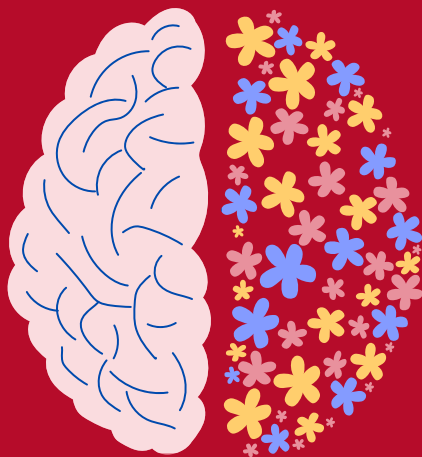
Patient self-management, also known as self-care, is an essential part of heart failure treatment¹. It is the ability of a heart failure patient to recognize and understand their signs and symptoms and then implement appropriate self-care strategies to alleviate them or minimize their impact on their engagement in activities of daily life^{1,2}.



Mental Health

Along with physical symptoms of heart failure, like fatigue and shortness of breath, individuals with this condition often experience challenges with their mental health²⁻⁴. Compared to the general Canadian population, those with heart failure are at greater risk for anxiety, depression, and stress⁵.

Introduction to Mental Health and Self-Care in Heart Failure



Heart Failure Self-Management

Patient self-management, also known as self-care, is an essential part of heart failure treatment¹. It is the ability of a heart failure patient to recognize and understand their signs and symptoms and then implement appropriate self-care strategies to alleviate them or minimize their impact on their engagement in activities of daily life^{1,2}.



Mental Health

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Introduction to Mental Health and Self-Care in Heart Failure

We acknowledge that not everyone experiences these symptoms severely enough to seek help, nor is everyone comfortable discussing mental health with providers or loved ones.

This is why we created this tool.

Our goal is to educate patients on the link between mental well-being and heart failure and provide evidence-based strategies for improving mental health independently.



Introduction to Mental Health and Self-Care in Heart Failure

How is this guide organized?

This tool is divided into five different sections.

The sections can be read in any order, and you can choose which area you would like to learn more about.

Depending on where you are in your heart failure journey, some of these recommendations may not be the best fit. We suggest exploring the activities that feel most relevant or meaningful to you.

Who is this guide for?

While this guide was written for people living with heart failure, it can help those with a heart condition too. We recommend sharing it with your loved ones and people that you trust. Reading and discussing this guide together can help them understand how to better support you in your heart health journey.



Nutrition

Our diet plays a big role in how we feel every day^{6,7}. Paying attention to what we eat can boost our mood, energy levels, heart health, and quality of life.

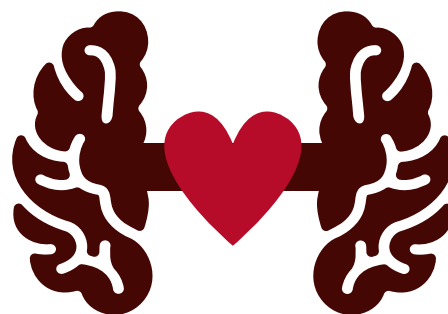
Eating healthier can improve mental well-being and lead to better heart failure outcomes^{6,7}.



This section will show you ways to enjoy a well-balanced diet that supports good health. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Exercise

When you move your body, your heart has to pump more blood to your muscles⁸. Doing this regularly helps your heart get stronger and better at its job⁸. People with heart failure who exercise often report feeling more physically able and stronger, and experience improvements in their overall heart failure symptoms⁹.



Since movement is so beneficial, this section will help you find enjoyable ways to add more movement to your day. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Mental Health

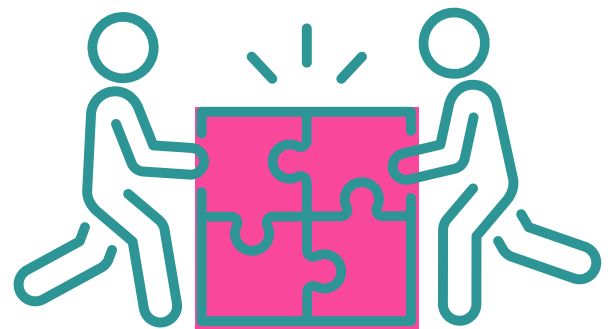
Heart failure comes with its own set of challenges and can lead to high levels of stress. As a result, patients living with heart failure are at a higher risk of depression and anxiety⁵. Since the brain and the heart are connected, experiencing poor mental health can also harm the health of our hearts¹⁰.



This section will teach you wellness practices that improve mental health and heart failure. Click here to learn more.

Social Support and Social Inclusion

Social support has a positive impact on both mental and physical health^{11,12}. When we feel supported by others, we tend to be more satisfied with our relationships¹². Strong social connections also help people manage heart failure more effectively¹³.



This section will give you tips on how to improve your social support network and feel more connected to your community. Click here to learn more.

Daily Wellness

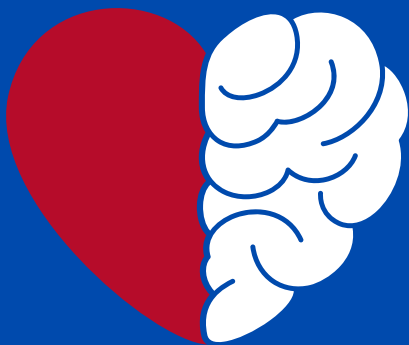
Our daily choices can support our health goals. Sleeping well and spending time in nature boost the health of people living with heart failure^{14,15}. Those who think positively also show good health outcomes¹⁶. Limiting alcohol, avoiding smoking, and engaging in meaningful activities are other choices that improve heart health^{17,18}.



This section will show you ways to make more informed choices that will improve your well-being in the long run. [Click here to learn more.](#)



About this Tool



This tool is part of the **Heart Health x Mental Well-being FRAME intervention** that aims to support patients, caregivers, and providers in improving the awareness, recognition, discussion, and management of mental health among individuals living with a heart condition.

FRAME Intervention

Foundation – Build your understanding of the connection between heart health and mental well-being.

Recognition – Identify early signs and risk factors for emotional distress, depression, anxiety and stress.

Awareness – Understand how heart failure can affect mood, relationships, identity, and quality of life.

Management – Learn and apply self-management strategies to care for your brain and heart health.

Engagement – Connect patients and caregivers with community resources and support preventative practices.

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Nutrition

Eating and feeling well with heart failure



Our diet plays a big role in how we feel every day^{1,2}.
Paying attention to what we eat can boost our mood,
energy levels, heart health, and quality of life.

**Eating healthier can improve mental well-being and lead
to better heart failure outcomes^{1,2}.**

Finding ways to enjoy a well-balanced diet is a great way to
support your health.



“And through my own
efforts, I changed pretty
much everything. I eat very
differently, I go to the gym
every morning, and my
stress is gone, my sleep
apnea is gone, my [weight]
is much better than it was.”



-Adult with Heart Failure, Ontario

Nutrition

Eating and feeling well with heart failure



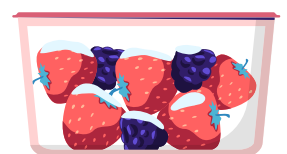
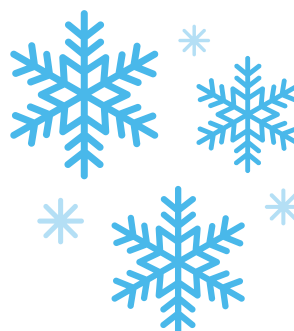
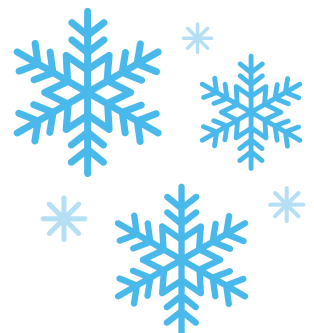
Healthy eating doesn't have to be expensive

Before you begin reading this section, we want to address a misconception that many people hold, which is the belief that healthy eating means shopping at expensive grocery stores and spending lots of money.

This is not the case. Eating healthily is achievable regardless of your budget.

Purchasing frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are two ways to help you save money while improving your diet.

Fruits and vegetables are frozen immediately after they are picked. This is why they retain the same nutrition as fresh fruits and vegetables³. Most grocery stores sell frozen fruits and vegetables at a lower price than fresh ones.



Nutrition

Eating and feeling well with heart failure



Because they last longer in the freezer, buying them frozen helps prevent you from throwing them out if they spoil before you can use them. **The less food you waste, the more money you save and the better it is for the health of our environment³.**



Buying canned foods can also make your groceries last longer. Opt for those with little or no added sugar or sodium⁴.

Getting started with small steps

Changing your diet and paying attention to what you eat can be stressful, especially when you hear so many different ideas on what healthy eating looks like. Another misconception about healthy eating is that you must change everything about your diet all at once. Again, this is incorrect.



Instead of trying many new changes at once, pick one you like and try it. Once consistent, add others gradually. **Sudden changes rarely last. Small, steady changes usually make the biggest difference.**

Click on each section to learn about simple, yet effective ways you can use your nutrition to support your brain and heart health each day.

The Healthy Eating Plate

Patients who follow this style of eating tend to live longer, experience lower levels of depression and anxiety, and have less severe heart symptoms⁵⁻⁸.

Research has found that omega-3 supplementation can help with depression, inflammation, and cardiac function⁹.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Antioxidants

Eating antioxidant-rich foods may lower your risk of depression and support better heart health^{1,10}.

Vitamins and minerals offer many health benefits. For people living with heart failure, they can help support brain health, movement, taste, and longevity¹¹⁻¹⁶.

Vitamins & Minerals

Prebiotics & Probiotics

Prebiotics and probiotics support gut health. They have been shown to boost immune function, enhance heart and mental health, and lower inflammation^{1,17-19}.



The Healthy Eating Plate



Canada's Food Guide provides recommendations on how to eat healthy to maintain good health²⁰. Its suggestions cover many topics, such as cooking at home more often than eating out, eating your meals with loved ones, and limiting packaged foods, which are foods that are highly processed.

Another very helpful recommendation it provides is the **Food Guide Snapshot**, a visual diagram that displays what a healthy, well-balanced meal looks like.



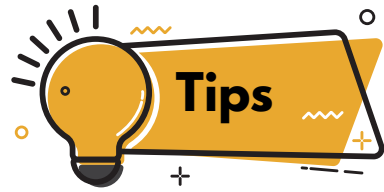
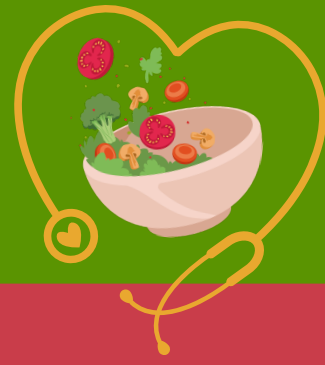
When serving yourself food, doing your best to follow the Food Guide Snapshot can help you ensure that the types and amounts of foods you choose make your plate a healthy one!

The foods found on a healthy eating plate are also those that are recommended by the Mediterranean Diet²¹.

Research shows that following these eating tips can help improve heart and brain health, help people live longer, and improve quality of life⁵. These recommendations can also lead to better heart health and lower inflammation^{7,8}



The Healthy Eating Plate



Building a healthy plate is simple. All you need to do is pay attention three types of foods:

Fruits and Vegetables

Remember that a healthy plate is a colourful plate. Aim to fill $\frac{1}{2}$ of your plate with fruits and vegetables.

Try replacing sugary snacks with fruit and choose to eat whole fruits instead of fruit juices.



Protein-Rich Foods

Ensure that you get enough protein in your diet by building $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate with foods high in protein.

If you eat meat, try including plant-based proteins into your diet too. Examples include nuts, beans, and seeds.

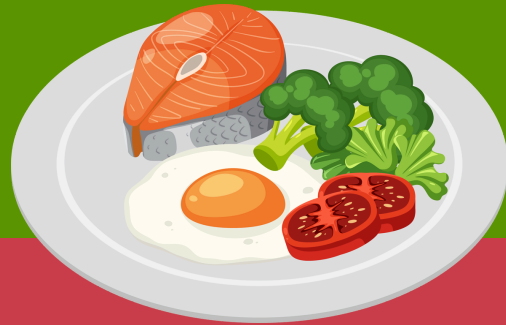
Wholegrain Foods

Wholegrain foods are a good source of fibre, which provides many heart health benefits. Examples of wholegrains include quinoa, brown rice, wholegrain oats, wholegrain pasta, and wholegrain bread.

When serving yourself wholegrain foods, try to keep their serving size to $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate.

To learn more about Canada's Food Guide and the Healthy Eating Plate, [check out this link.](#)

Omega-3 Fatty Acids



Omega-3 Poly Unsaturated Fatty Acids (Omega-3s) are a type of healthy fat found in certain foods. For people with heart failure, Omega-3s can help in several ways. They can lower depression, boost heart function, and reduce inflammation⁹. The Canadian Cardiovascular Society says that Omega-3s can be beneficial for heart failure patients. The European Society of Cardiology adds that they can help the mental well-being of chronic heart failure patients^{22,23}.



Sources of Omega-3s²⁴

Fatty Fish

Salmon, mackerel, tuna, herring, sardines

Nuts & Seeds

Chia seeds, hemp seeds, ground flaxseeds, walnuts

Oils

Flaxseed, canola, soybean, walnut, olive

Other Sources

Kelp, wakame seaweed, omega-3 fortified products



Tips



Consider cooking your foods at home with olive oil



Swap in flaxseed oil in your salad dressings, sauces, or dips



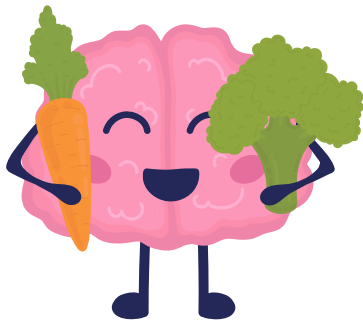
Try purchasing foods fortified with Omega-3s on your next grocery shopping trip



Sprinkle chia or ground flax seeds on oatmeal, salad, or yogurt parfait, or add them to your smoothies

Antioxidant Rich Foods

Antioxidants protect our cells from damage²⁵. Vitamin C, Vitamin E and Beta-Carotene are antioxidants that have shown to be beneficial for people living with heart failure¹¹. Research has found that heart failure patients who eat less antioxidants may face worse mental health²⁶.



Antioxidants play a key role in managing heart failure. They cut down inflammation and oxidative stress, which helps improve heart function¹.

Sources of Antioxidants²⁶⁻²⁸

Citrus Fruits

- Oranges
- Mandarins
- Limes
- Lemons

Vitamin C

- Strawberries
- Broccoli
- Tomatoes
- Red & green bell peppers

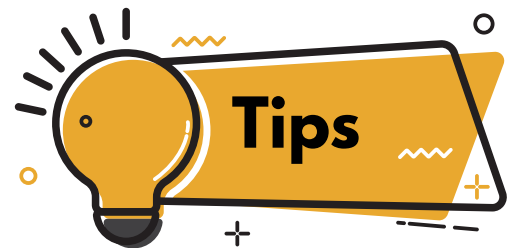
Vitamin E

- Almonds
- Sunflower Seeds
- Green leafy vegetables

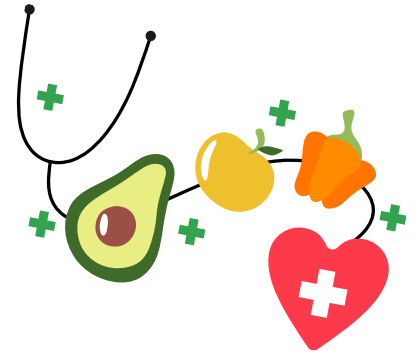
Beta-Carotene

- Carrots
- Spinach
- Sweet potatoes

Eating a mix of green, orange, red, and yellow fruits and vegetables is a great way to get antioxidants and other important nutrients.

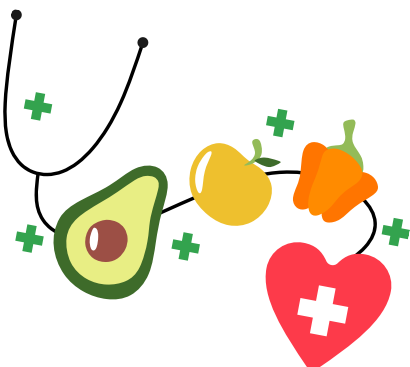


Try setting a goal to eat a new coloured fruit or vegetable each week. When in doubt, try making your plate as colourful as possible!



“ I have changed my diet, my way of eating [...] I really do watch my diet, eating proper foods, getting exercise [...] [Diet and exercise] is definitely beneficial. ”

-Adult with Heart Failure, Ontario



Vitamins and Minerals



Vitamins and minerals play an important role in keeping your mind and body healthy. Vitamins D and K, folate, magnesium, selenium, iron, and zinc tend to be low in patients with heart failure¹².

Low levels of these nutrients can hurt mental health and brain function and impact wound healing¹³⁻¹⁵.



It can lower how long a person lives, increase the risk of going to the hospital, and cause problems with appetite and taste^{12-14, 29}



Iron has been shown to help reduce heart failure symptoms and improve quality of life¹¹⁻¹⁶.



Studies show that Vitamin D can improve how well heart failure patients function and exercise¹¹.



SUN

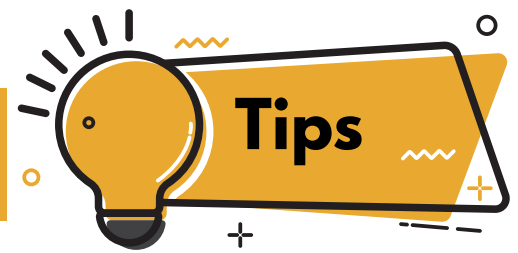
- Seeds (pumpkin, chia, sunflower)
- Nuts (brazil, cashews, pine nuts)

BRIGHT

- Beans (black, kidney, white, soy, baked)
- Green vegetables (spinach, kale, broccoli, brussel sprouts, lettuce, asparagus)
- Turkey, tuna, tofu, trout

PEACEFUL

- Peas (green, black-eyed), pumpkin
- Eggs
- Almonds, avocado
- Chicken, carrots, cabbage
- Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel), fortified foods
- Legumes

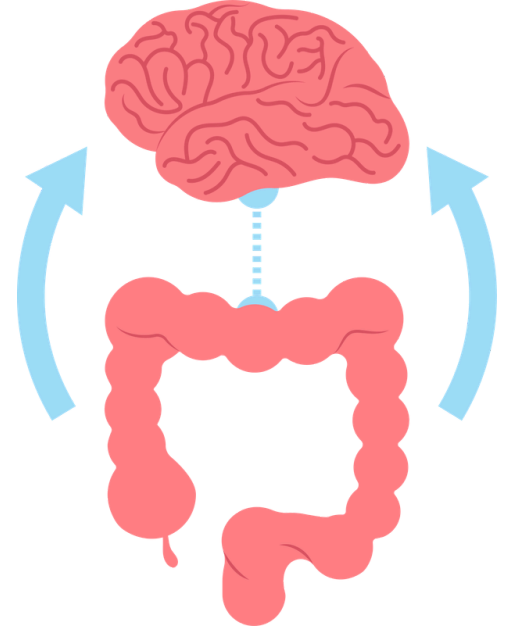


Tips

Many foods are rich in two or more of these minerals, making it easy to incorporate them in your diet. Use the phrase “The **SUN** is **BRIGHT** and **PEACEFUL**” to help you remember which foods are high in these nutrients!

Prebiotics and Probiotics

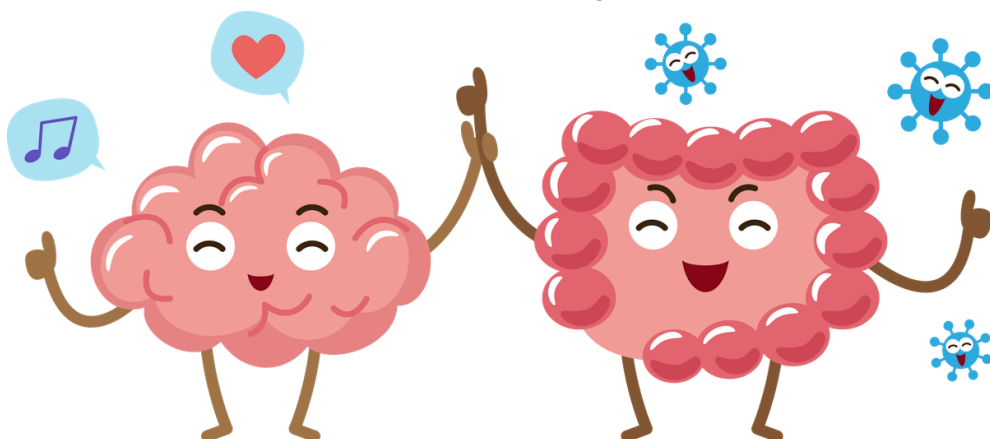
Our digestive system is the home of many microorganisms that are important for our health¹⁷. They are called the gut microbiome. An unhealthy gut microbiome is connected to various health problems, like heart failure¹⁷. There's also a connection between our gut microbiome and our brain¹⁸. Disruptions in our gut bacteria can lead to depression and anxiety¹⁸.



Probiotics

Probiotics are foods that contain good bacteria that are just like those living in our gut. Studies show that heart failure patients who eat probiotic yogurt can see improvements in artery health. They can also have better immune function and less inflammation¹.

Along with yogurt, other sources of probiotics include kefir, kombucha, sourdough bread, certain cheeses, sauerkraut, pickles, kimchi, tempeh, and miso³⁰.



Prebiotics and Probiotics

Prebiotics are foods that help nourish our gut bacteria and keep them healthy. Including prebiotics in our diet lets us enjoy the health benefits that our gut microbiome can offer us¹⁹.

Prebiotics

Good sources of prebiotics are garlic, onions, bananas, soybeans, tomatoes, asparagus, and whole-grain products³¹.

Tips

- Use fresh garlic and onions to add flavour to your favourite dishes.
- Purchase wholegrain breads, pastas, and cereals. They contain fibre that supports our gut health.
- When looking for a mid-day snack, have yogurt with fruit and nuts.
- Try adding yogurt to your home-made sauce, marinade, and salad dressing recipes.

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Exercise

Supporting your heart and mind through movement



If you've heard the phrase, "movement is medicine," you are likely familiar with how important moving our bodies is for our overall mental and physical well-being. We can think of movement in two different ways: physical activity and exercise.

Physical Activity

Physical Activity is any type of activity in which you move your body¹. Examples include: walking around your home, doing household chores, and carrying your groceries².



Exercise

Exercise is any physical activity that you do on purpose².

This can include going for a walk, taking a dance class, lifting weights, or playing sports.

Research shows that exercise is safe and helpful for people living with heart failure³.



Exercise

Supporting your heart and mind through movement



What do heart experts recommend?

The Canadian Cardiovascular Society recommends exercise for people living with heart failure⁴. It can help improve symptoms and quality of life⁴. It can also lower the chances of needing to go to the hospital⁴.

In this section, you'll learn a few proven ways to move your body.

These strategies have also worked for other heart failure patients. **If it works for them, it can work for you too.**

Just listen to your body, try your best, and have fun.



Quick
Tips



If the word “exercise” feels intimidating, think of it as simply moving your body in a way that feels good, at a pace that works for you.

Exercise

Supporting your heart and mind through movement



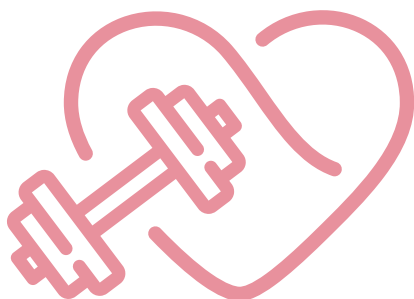
Both physical activity and exercise are important.

Adding more movement into your day, whether through daily activities or planned exercise, can help improve your health. Any form of movement is better than no movement². Even doing just a few minutes a day can have health benefits².



But being active can be hard.

There are many heart failure symptoms that make it harder to feel motivated to exercise. These include fatigue, shortness of breath, coughing, and wheezing⁵. Experiencing depression, anxiety, or feeling scared that exercise might make one's symptoms worse are also common barriers that stop heart failure patients from exercising⁶. Luckily, regular exercise can help reduce many of these symptoms and feelings over time⁷.



How can exercise help your heart function?

When you move your body, your heart has to pump more blood to your muscles³. The more you do this, the stronger your heart becomes³. Research shows that people living with heart failure who exercise often feel stronger and more able⁸.

Exercise

Supporting your heart and mind through movement



Finding an exercise routine that works for you can make it easier and less stressful to start being active. This approach can help people living with heart failure stay committed to being active in the long term^{6,9}.

Adapted Exercises

Group exercises classes can help living people with heart failure adopt an active lifestyle for the long-term⁹. It can also help lower feelings of depression and improve quality of life^{8,10}.

Group Exercise

Research has found that yoga can improve the mental health and quality of life of heart failure patients^{9,11}. It can also help their heart and lungs work better^{9,11}.

Yoga

People living with heart failure who do Tai Chi often feel less depressed and more connected to others^{12,13}. Tai chi also improves their mood and emotional well-being^{12,13}.

Tai Chi

Aerobic exercises, such as walking, has been found to help people living with heart failure feel healthier, move better, and enjoy a higher quality of life^{6,14}.

Aerobic Exercise

Strength training boosts heart health. It can improve feelings of depression and help heart failure patients complete their day-to-day tasks and responsibilities^{6,12}.

Strength Training

Adapted and Modified Exercises



Low-intensity exercises are gentle activities that don't put too much strain on your heart or body. They can be beneficial for people who experience more heart failure symptoms or who tire easily. Because these exercises are more manageable, it's often easier to stick with them long-term. This helps you get the health benefits that come from regular movement⁶.



Quick Tips



- Don't be afraid to modify exercises to be low impact. Listen to your body, it knows best.
- Look for guidance to keep you safe and ensure that you are doing the movements correctly. You can do this by following along with online workout videos or going to in-person classes. [Click here to explore some exercise programs near you.](#)
- Each day will be different. This is okay. If you have less energy one day, take it easy that day. There is no right or wrong way to stay active. What is best for you will change. Be open to this change.
- Remember that the best exercise routine is one that can be maintained in the long run. It is better to start small and continue than "go all in" right away and quit.

**“ This [chair exercise] class is
changing their lives.**

**These [heart failure patients] weren't
going out to their mailboxes, and
then they took this class. [...] Now
they can play with their
grandchildren [...]**

**The most positive
feedback I get is for [this class]. ”**

-Healthcare Provider, Ontario



**[Click here to try a class from this program
from the comfort of your own home.](#)**

Group Exercises



Solo vs. group exercise: which is better for you?

You can exercise alone or with other people. Both are beneficial. That being said, exercising with others can provide benefits that go beyond making our bodies strong. Working out with other people gives you the chance to be social and make new friends.



Many experts believe that the social aspect of group exercise is the reason why leaving one's home to exercise is often better than solo exercise routines for lowering feelings of depression⁸.

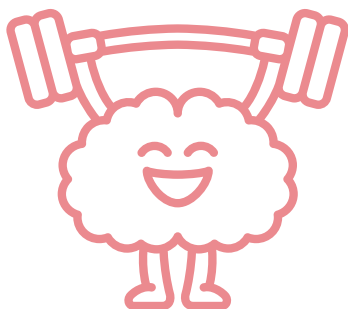
Exercising with others can help us stay motivated.

Research shows that heart failure patients are more likely to stick with a group exercise program when they get support from others and have chances to socialize⁹. **Think about it this way:** if other people are counting on you to show up, you will feel more motivated to stay on track⁶.



Studies have also found that when heart failure patients get care and support while exercising, their quality of life gets much better¹⁰.

Group Exercises



Read on to learn more about the different ways you can be active and social at the same time!

Quick
Tips



- Explore group activities that interest you and invite a friend to come along. Trying something new with someone you trust can ease nervous feelings and help you focus on enjoying yourself.
- You can also add movement to things you already do with loved ones. For example, instead of sitting and talking after dinner, go for a light walk at a pace where you can still talk. This helps you stay active, spend time together, and can even help your body digest your food better.

“Most patients who have undergone an exercise program do find that it’s helped a lot with their mood.”

- Healthcare Provider, Ontario

Yoga



Yoga is an exercise that connects the mind and body. People who practice yoga move through different poses that stretch their muscles and build strength. As they hold these poses, they also focus on controlling their breath. This can calm the mind and give the brain a mental workout too¹¹.

Research found that people living with heart failure who joined a yoga program experienced many health benefits⁹. These included improvements in their:



Depression, anxiety, and stress.



Balance, strength, and endurance.



Breathing and pain.



Mobility and flexibility.



Many of these patients were also beginners to exercise⁹.

This shows us that we don't need to be perfect to start moving our bodies.

Quick
Tips



How to begin a regular yoga practice:

- Try signing up for a yoga class at your local gym, studio, or community centre.
- Check out this link for some free, follow-along yoga videos that you can do at home.
- Find some easy, beginner poses that look comfortable for you. Try incorporating them throughout the day, such as before bedtime. Click here to help you get started.



What is Tai Chi?

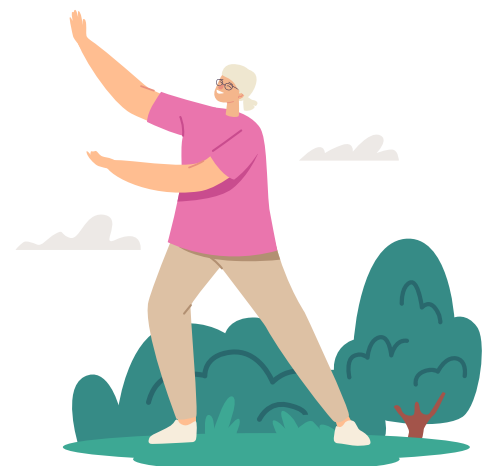
Tai Chi is a type of low-impact exercise where people go through a series of slow movements¹⁵. As they move, they keep their muscles relaxed and take deep breaths¹⁵.



Tai Chi and Heart Failure

For people living with heart failure, Tai Chi has been shown to help:

- Lower depression^{12,16,17}.
- Improve sleep quality¹⁶.
- The heart pump blood better^{16,18}.
- Boost functional capacity^{16,18}.
- Enhance quality of life¹⁸.





Tai Chi and Mental Wellness

When people do Tai Chi, they are encouraged to pay attention to how their body feels while they move. Because this helps them calm the mind and focus on the present moment, Tai Chi is also seen as a type of mindfulness practice^{13,15,16}.

Tai Chi and Social Wellness

Tai Chi also helps patients living with heart failure take part in more social activities¹³. This is because it makes them feel better emotionally, which then gives them the confidence to do activities they enjoy more often¹³.



How to Begin a Regular Tai Chi Practice:

- Try signing up for a Tai Chi class at your local gym or community centre.
- Check out this 7-minute Tai Chi video for beginners. If you're looking for a longer session, check out this 15-minute beginner Tai Chi video. Both are easy to follow along at home.
- Find some easy, beginner poses that look comfortable for you. Try incorporating them throughout the day, such as before bedtime. Click here to see some we selected to help you get started.

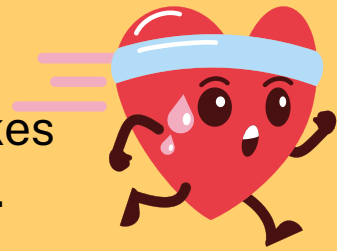
Quick
Tips



Aerobic Exercise



Aerobic exercise is when you move your body in a way that keeps your heart working for a longer time. It makes your heart beat faster and helps improve heart health¹.



This type of exercise is also called endurance exercise or cardiovascular exercise¹. When people say they are doing “cardio,” they are talking about aerobic exercise.

For people living with heart failure, aerobic exercise boosts quality of life and their physical functionality⁶.



Walking and dancing are easy and fun ways to get more aerobic exercise in your daily routine. Other examples include swimming, bicycling, and jumping rope.

“I figured okay, I don't want to be like this forever so I'm going to have to do some exercise. Swimming is something I've done my whole life. I really like swimming [...] Within a couple of weeks I could [swim in the deep end] and that was amazing.”

-Adult with Heart Failure, Ontario



Dancing

People with heart failure who joined a dance program had better heart health and quality of life⁶. They were also more motivated to stay active than the patients who joined other exercise programs⁶.

Quick Tips



- Try counting your steps to see what your usual movement level is. Each week, set a goal to increase your step count higher than your usual number. For example, try to get 500 more steps than the week before.
- Set an alarm on your phone that reminds you to move your body every hour. This will get you into the habit of breaking up long periods of sitting with some form of activity.
- Leave your workout clothes and exercise shoes somewhere you can see them. This will serve as a visual reminder to be active and make it easier to start.

Strength Training



Strength training is exercise that makes our muscles stronger.



Strength training means making your muscles work by moving something heavy. This can be your own body, like when you do push-ups, sit-ups, or squats. You can also use equipment like dumbbells, resistance bands, or gym machines, to help build muscle.

Strength training improves the cardiovascular fitness and heart function of heart failure patients⁶.

Research shows that resistance band exercises can help reduce depression in people living with heart failure¹².

It is also common for people living with heart failure to do a combination of strength training and aerobic exercise. This also provides many health benefits^{7,8,19}. These include:

-  Reduced depression symptoms.
-  Improved physical functioning and mobility.
-  Improved quality of life.
-  Better muscle strength.
-  Increased exercise capacity.



Strength Training



Quick Tips



- Watch this video to learn more about strength training for people living with heart conditions.
- Go at your own pace. If you want to use weights, start off small and work your way up slowly. Remember that body-weighted exercise are just as good as using equipment.
- There are many great videos online that can teach you how to exercise safely. Here are some to help you get started.
- Take breaks when needed. Keep a bottle of water with you at all times and continue to sip on it as you go through your workout.
- If something doesn't feel good, stop right away. If you're unsure about something, chat with your healthcare provider to make sure how you choose to move your body is good for your health and your heart.

“ [Exercise is] very much [helping my mental health]. ”

-Adult with Heart Failure, Ontario



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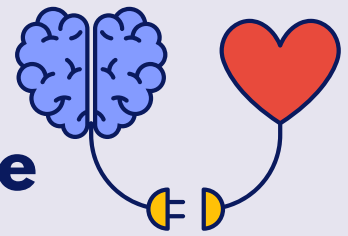
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Living Well:

Mental Wellbeing and Heart Failure

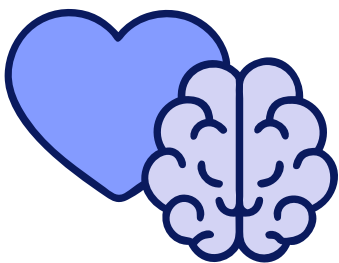


Living with heart failure is not easy.

One day, things are business as usual; the next day, you have a life-changing diagnosis. Suddenly, you have much more to worry about: doctor's appointments, taking medication on time, paying attention to what you eat, and trying to exercise.



This can take a toll on your mental well-being.



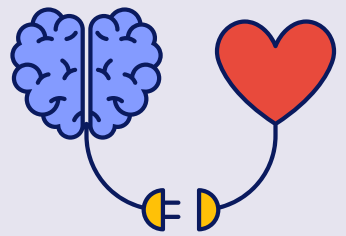
With so much going on, it's no surprise that people living with heart failure often feel anxious or sad¹. The good news is that doctors and researchers have learned a lot about how the heart and the brain are connected². This guide will help you learn about that connection and give you simple ways to feel better every day.

“ I've always taken care of other people. I've always put them before me [...] It was only after I went to the hospital [...] that it really hit me. It's like, okay, you've done your share. Now it's time to take care of you. ”

-Adult with Heart Failure, Ontario

Living Well:

Mental Wellbeing and Heart Failure



Click on each section to learn ways to support your heart and mind.

Relaxation Techniques

Managing stress helps the heart and the brain for people with heart failure³.

Meditation can help when you feel anxious or low^{4,5}. It can also lessen heart failure symptoms and boost quality of life^{4,5}.

Meditation

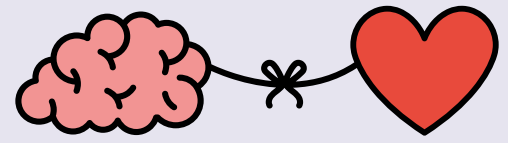
Gratitude

Being grateful can improve your heart function, sleep, and mental health^{6,7}.

People with heart failure who feel more confident and in control often feel better emotionally and take better care of their health^{8,9}. Setting goals can help build that confidence⁷.

Goal Setting

Relaxation Techniques



The Mind-Brain-Heart Connection

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada tells us that the mind, heart, and body are connected¹⁰. This means that your mental health can influence your heart failure^{2,10}.



Experiencing high levels of stress can harm your brain and your heart.

Stress Management

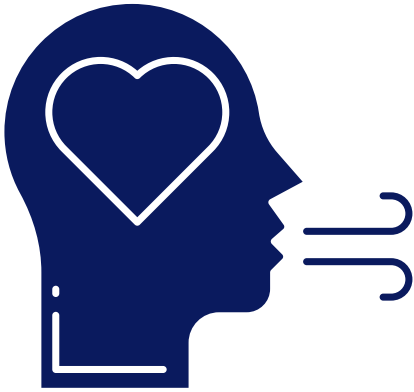


Stress can also make it hard to follow your doctor's advice or take your medication on time. Both of these things are very important when living with heart failure^{2,5}. This is why managing your stress is important. Engaging in activities that promote relaxation helps us let go of stress and improve our health.

People living with heart failure who found ways to manage their stress had lower depression and stress scores³. In this guide, you will learn a few ways to do this.

Relaxation Techniques

What one person finds relaxing may not be enjoyable for someone else. This is okay because everyone is different. In this section, learn and explore what works for you.

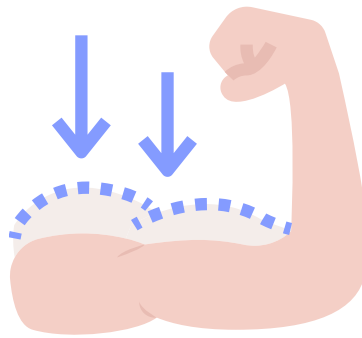


Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive means going slowly, one step at a time. In progressive muscle relaxation, we can let go of the stress our body is holding by focusing on one body part at a time. We do this by slowly tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups, starting at the top of our head and then going all the way down to our toes.

Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises are patterns of moving air in and out of your body in a way that helps the body and the mind feel calm and relaxed. When you're focusing on following the breathing pattern, your mind lets go of thoughts that can make you feel worried or stressed. As your mind gets cleared, you're able to live in the present moment.



Visualization

Visualization, also known as guided imagery, is a practice of imagining that you're in a place where you feel safe and happy. When we see these positive images in our mind, our body thinks they are really happening. This helps us feel calm and relaxed.

Relaxation Techniques

Box Breathing

The Canadian Cardiovascular Society recommends breathing exercises for patients with heart failure that feel anxious¹¹. Box breathing is also a great way to manage stress and prevent anxiety. Try this exercise when you notice any feelings of overwhelm coming to the surface.



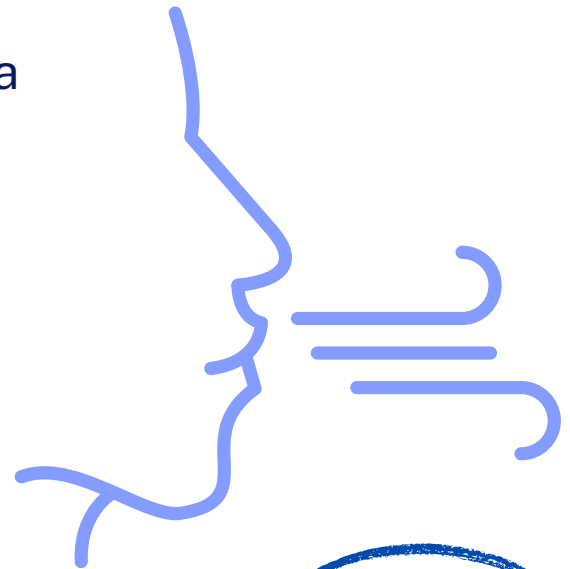
Step 1: Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of 4.

Step 2: Hold your breath for a count of 4.

Step 3: Exhale slowly through your nose for a count of 4.

Step 4: Hold again for a count of 4.

Step 5: Repeat this cycle as many times as you'd like, keeping your breaths slow and steady.



TIP

Imagine drawing a square in your mind as you do this exercise. Draw one line of the square each time you breathe in, hold your breath, and breathe out.

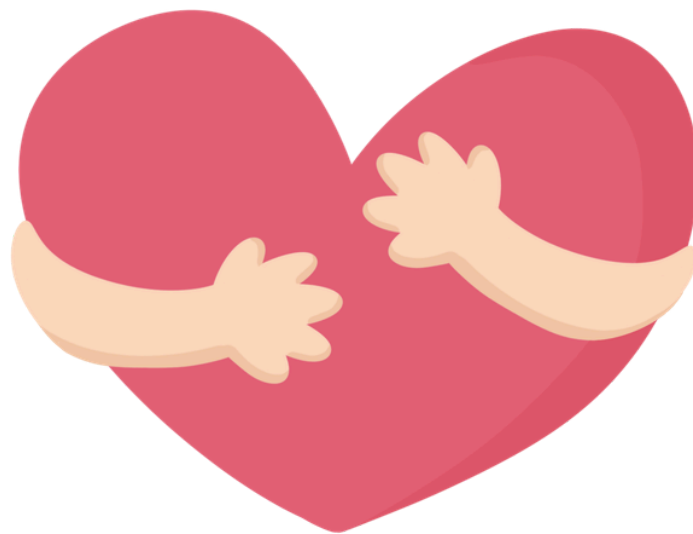


Relaxation Techniques

Hand-on-Heart Relaxation for Feelings of Safety

Step 1: Place one hand on your heart and the other on your belly. Notice how the rise and fall of your chest and belly feels on your hands.

Step 2: Next, in your mind, tell yourself positive affirmations like “I am safe”, “I am strong”, “I am right where I’m supposed to be”.



Relaxation Techniques

Deep Belly Breathing

Studies show that deep belly breathing helps the heart and lungs of people with heart failure work better¹².

Step 1:
Get Comfortable Sit up in a comfortable position with your back supported.

Step 2:
Position your Hands Put one hand in the centre of your chest and the other on your belly, right over your belly button.

Step 3:
Breath In Take a deep breath in through your nose. Imagine you're sending the air down to your belly so it expands outward. You should feel the hand on your belly rise. Hold your breath for a few seconds.

Step 4:
Exhale Slowly exhale through pursed lips (like you're blowing out a candle). As you breathe out, gently pull your belly back in. You should feel the hand on your belly lower as the air leaves your body.

Step 5:
Repeat Continue breathing for a rounds.
Try making your breaths slow and steady.

Relaxation Techniques

Visualization for Relaxation

Step 1: Sit or lie down in a position where you feel relaxed and supported.

Step 2: Close your eyes and take a few slow, natural breaths, in and out, without trying to change your breathing.

Step 3: Picture something that brings you peace or joy. This could be the face of a loved one or pet, a calming place like a beach or garden, or even yourself achieving something meaningful.

People with heart failure who learn relaxation and visualization skills experience a boost in their quality of life⁹.

Learning these skills also helps with depression and physical mobility⁹.

TIP

Try to fully immerse yourself in the scene: what do you see, hear, smell, or feel? The more vivid the image, the more relaxing it can be.

Relaxation Techniques

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation are two ways to de-stress. For people living with heart failure, it can lower anxiety and make breathing easier³. These practices can also boost quality of life.

Step 1: Get Comfortable

Find a quiet, comfortable spot where you feel safe. You can sit or lie down.

Step 2: Tense Your Muscles

Start with a muscle group near the top of your body. Take a deep breath in and tighten those muscles as much as feels comfortable. Hold that tension for about 5 to 10 seconds. For example, if you're tensing your shoulders, try lifting them up like you're trying to touch your ears.

Step 3: Relax and Let Go

As you breathe out, let all the tension go. Let your muscles completely relax and notice how that feels. Stay in this relaxed state for 15 to 20 seconds.

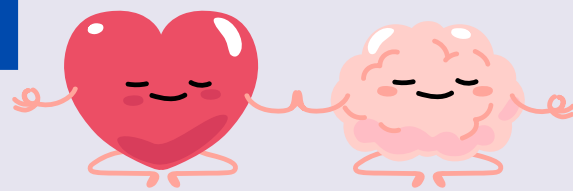
Step 4: Repeat Throughout Your Body

Keep going, one muscle group at a time, working your way down your body; chest, arms, hands, stomach, legs, and feet. After you've gone through all the muscle groups, take a few quiet moments to enjoy how relaxed you feel.

TIP

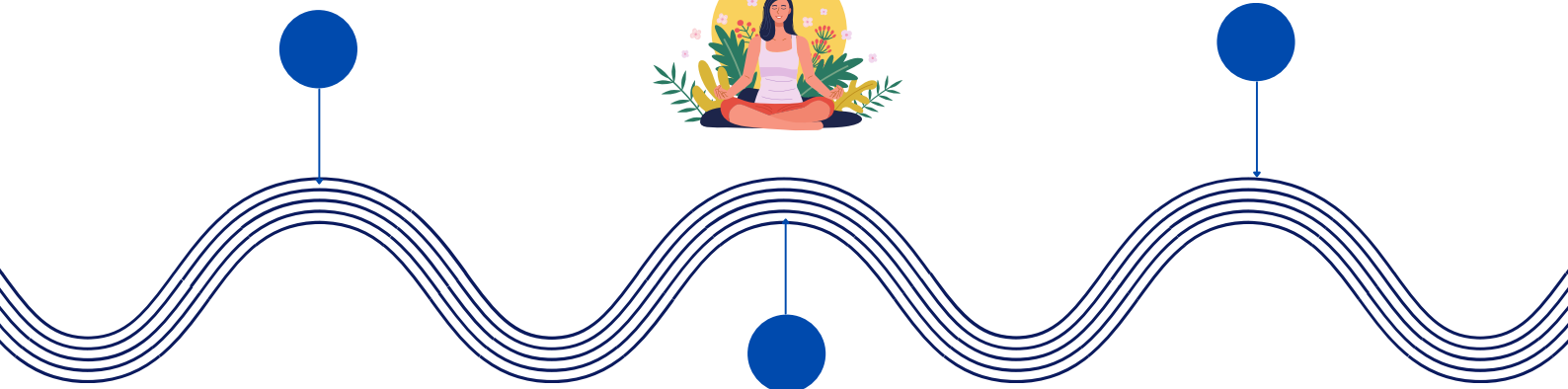
Remember to contract your muscle groups in a way that you're comfortable with. Focus on your safety and what feels good. If something becomes painful, stop right away.

Meditation and Mindfulness

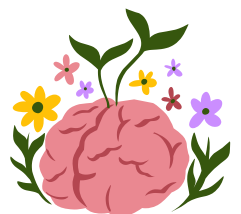


In today's fast-paced world, our attention is pulled in many directions. Life can feel like “go, go, go” with no time to pause and breathe, scattering our thoughts and causing stress.

By reducing the constant flow of thoughts that often overwhelm us, meditation helps release stress and get us out of our heads. This helps us focus more on the life happening around us right now².



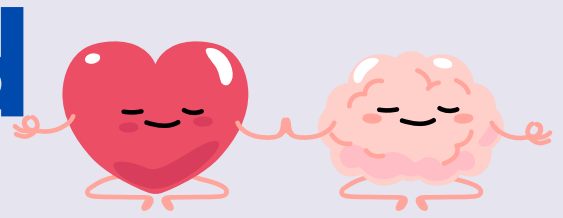
This is where meditation, also known as mindfulness, comes in. Meditation clears and calms the mind. It does this by moving our attention from the outside world to ourselves¹².



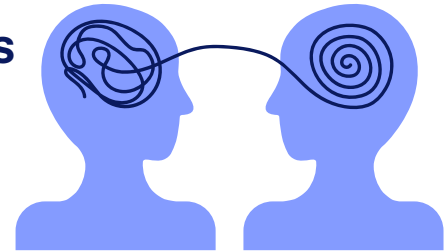
“ I also think it is a lot of mind over matter. You have to do a lot of mindfulness, as I call it [.....]
I think that helps you to just not sit and think so much about your health and what's going on.
So it's about finding a path that works for you, right? ”

-Adult with Heart Failure, Ontario

Meditation and Mindfulness



Meditation and stress management techniques can help lower depression and anxiety, reduce heart failure symptoms, and improve exercise ability and quality of life^{4,5}.



There are many ways to meditate. Meditation is a practice that is different for everyone. In this guide, you will learn about a few different seated meditation techniques.

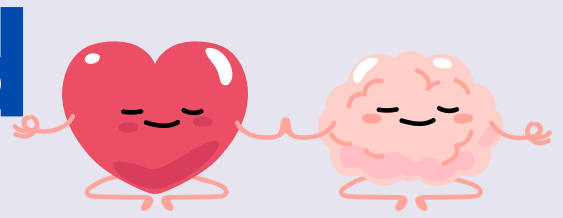
All seated meditations begin in the same way: Find a quiet and safe space where you can sit or lie down comfortably with your eyes closed.

Once you have closed your eyes, what you do next will depend on the technique you selected to try out. You'll learn more about this on the next few pages.

You can choose how long you'd like to meditate for. Try starting at 5 minutes. For beginners, sitting in silence and becoming aware of our feelings can feel uncomfortable. This is normal; we aren't used to being alone with our emotions.

With time, meditation helps us accept our thoughts instead of trying to change them. This allows us to center ourselves and find balance amid daily chaos.

Meditation and Mindfulness



Types of Seated Meditations

Mindfulness Meditation

A meditation practice that places focus the breath.

Once your eyes are closed, focus on the inflow and outflow of your breath.

Anytime you notice your mind wandering, gently bring your attention back to your breath, and to the rise and fall of your chest.

For this meditation, you need to select a mantra. Close your eyes and mentally repeat your mantra as you breathe in and out. When your mind drifts, return your focus to your chosen mantra.

Mantra Meditation

A meditation practice that uses the mental repetition of a mantra (a word, sound, or phrase).

TIP

Think of a mantra as a positive affirmation. Some examples of mantras include:

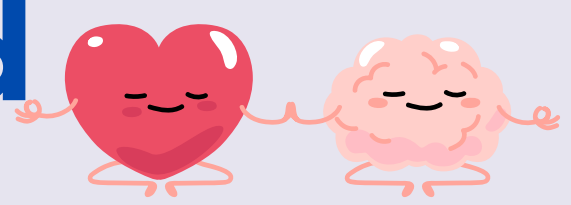
- I am full of happiness and joy.
- I am strong, I am brave.
- I deeply and completely love myself.
- I choose to make today wonderful.



“ The trick is in what one emphasizes. We either make ourselves miserable, or we make ourselves happy. The amount of work is the same. ”

-Carlos Castaneda, Best Selling Latin-America Philosopher and Author

Meditation and Mindfulness



Zen Meditation

A meditation practice that encourages us to let go of judgement and accept ourselves exactly as we are.

As you slowly breath in and out with your eyes closed, notice any thoughts, emotions, or heart failure symptoms that come up. Don't try to change them. Don't try to label them as "good" or "bad". Just accept them and watch as they pass by and go away.

Guided Meditation

A meditation practice where someone guides you to a state of relaxation and calm.

With your eyes closed, listen to the instructions you're given and follow along. If you're at home, this can be through a recording. If you're in person, this can be the voice of a teacher.



TIP

Remember, there is no right or wrong way to meditate. As time goes on and you try out different techniques, you will find what works best for you.

Some guided meditations can help you learn something new about yourself. Others support you in feeling at peace and ease.





“How I like to start my day is by looking around and saying 'Okay, I'm here again and what can I do with today?' I'm going to make today good. I'm thankful that I'm still here.”

-Adult with Heart Failure, Ontario



The Practice of Gratitude



Practicing gratitude is all about counting your blessings. Being grateful means noticing the good things in your life and the world around you. Things don't have to be perfect for you to feel grateful.

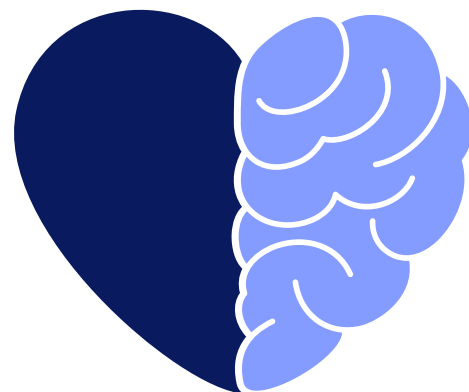
Gratitude interventions improve the physical, psychological, and social well-being of heart failure patients⁶.



All you need to do is shift your focus to what is going well. This can be as simple as admiring the beauty of flowers growing on a tree, or enjoying the company of your loved ones.

The Benefits of Gratitude in Heart Failure

- ✿ Helps patients take their medications more regularly^{6,7}.
- ✿ Helps slow down the progression of heart failure^{6,7}.
- ✿ Improves sleep^{6,7}.
- ✿ Helps improve low mood^{6,7}.
- ✿ Reduces inflammation⁶. This lowers the risk of other serious heart issues⁶.



The Practice of Gratitude



There are many ways to express gratitude. We recommend choosing one that interests you and is easier for you to do. If you feel excited to do it, you are more likely to maintain the practice over the long run.

Here are some ideas for you to get started!

Try journaling

Keep a gratitude journal on your bedside table. Write 3 things you are thankful for in the morning or as you wind down after a long day.



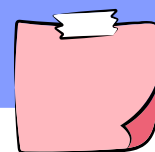
Set an alarm

Set an alarm on your phone and label it "gratitude." When it rings, close your eyes, smile, and think of something you're thankful for.



Use sticky notes

Write "gratitude" on a sticky note and place it on your bathroom mirror. Each morning while brushing your teeth, think of someone or something that makes your life better.



By choosing to appreciate what is going well, you sleep better, have more energy, and feel happier⁷. This can inspire you to try new things, build good habits, and do activities that bring you joy⁷. Being grateful can also help you face challenges calmly and find smart solutions.

Goal Setting



Self-Efficacy

Researchers have looked at how feeling confident in yourself can affect your health when living with heart failure. This confidence is called **self-efficacy** — it means **believing you can do something, like follow your care plan or manage your symptoms**⁸.



For heart failure patients, low levels of self-efficacy can lead to poor self-care⁸.

Heart failure patients with higher levels of perceived control are less likely to experience depression⁹.



Perceived Control

Related to self-confidence is **perceived control, which is the belief that you are able to handle any bad or stressful events that come your way**⁹.

Research shows that people with heart failure who feel more confident and in control tend to have better mental health and manage their condition more effectively.

One way to build that confidence is by setting small goals. Practicing gratitude can also help you feel more in control⁷.

TIP

While it can sound a bit overwhelming to set a goal, it can actually be a fun process.

Think of it as a way to challenge yourself. It's something you **GET** to do, rather than something you **HAVE** to do.

Goal Setting



A helpful technique to set goals is to use the SMART framework. A SMART goal is one that is:

Specific. A specific goal states exactly what you want to accomplish.

Measurable. A measurable goal is one whose progress can be tracked.

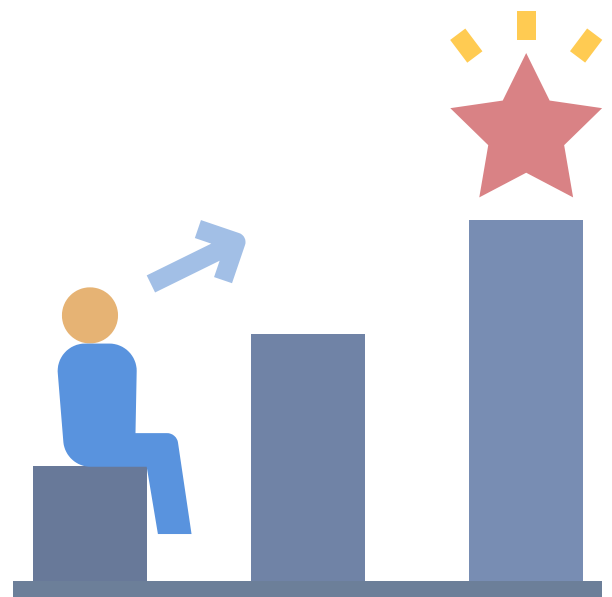
Actionable. An actionable goal is clear on what needs to be done to accomplish it.

Realistic. A realistic goal is one that can be accomplished. It should also be aligned with your interests and values, so you feel motivated to work towards it.

Time-Bound. A timely goal is one that has a date it will be accomplished by.

TIP

When setting your goal, think about what you will enjoy. Try not to focus on other people think you should do.



[To learn more about goal setting, check out this link.](#)

Goal Setting

An example of a SMART Goal:



- Specific: I want to increase my physical fitness.
- Measurable : When I can walk for 15 minutes without feeling out of breath.
- Actionable: I will go for a walk 2-3x per week.
- Realistic: I will go with my friend in my neighbourhood who is also interested in walking and will hold me accountable. This is something I will want to do because I enjoy spending time with this friend
- Time-Bound: I will start with 5 minutes and increase by 3 minutes each week, so that by the end of the month, I can walk 15 minutes in one go.

TIP

Answer these questions to help you get started on setting your goals.

- Specific: What exactly do you want to accomplish?
- Measurable: How will you know when you have accomplished your task?
- Actionable: What steps do you need to take to complete the task?
- Realistic and Relevant: Is this a task that can be accomplished? Does it align with your interests and values?
- Time-Bound: When will you be doing this task? When will it be accomplished?

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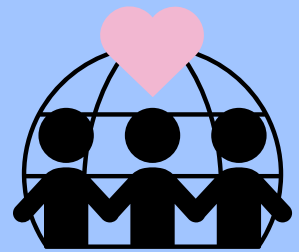
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Social Well-Being

Supporting your brain-heart health
by connecting with others



Social support refers to the relationships you have with the people around you¹.

Research consistently shows that being supported by others **benefits our mental and physical health^{1,2}**. The quality of our connections with our loved ones can be defined by a few things. This includes getting emotional support, like feeling appreciated and understood, as well as receiving advice, guidance, and helpful resources that help with everyday life¹.

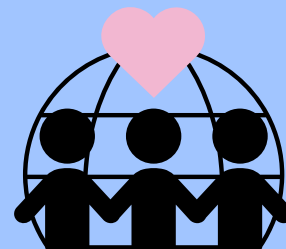


Being a member of a group, such as a book club or exercise program, is another way to **feel more connected** and involved with a community of other people who share similar interests and values¹.

When we have good relationships with our loved ones, we know we have a place where we belong.

Social Well-Being

Supporting your brain-heart health by connecting with others



The benefits of social support and social integration

People with more social support and connections experience less anxiety and depression². Feeling supported by loved ones can also improve your stress management². This is because it allows **individuals to understand that they aren't alone in the problems that they face²**.



Social support and heart failure

Social support also **strengthens resilience**, which is the ability to bounce back from challenges³. Research shows that heart failure patients who receive higher levels of support from their family, relatives, friends, and social organizations tend to be more resilient³.

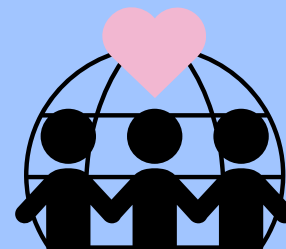


Given that a heart failure diagnosis presents many challenges, this research demonstrates **how important it is for people living with heart failure to develop and maintain a strong social support network³**.

This section offers a variety of simple and meaningful ways to stay connected and engaged. Try the strategies and tips that resonate most with you.

Social Well-Being

**Supporting your brain-heart health
by connecting with others**



**Maintaining
strong
connections with
your loved ones**

**People living with heart failure who have
good quality relationships with their loved
ones tend to have better health
and well-being⁴.**

**Leveraging the
power of
peer support**

**Joining a peer support group can boost
heart failure patient's motivation to
practice self-care and live a healthier life⁵⁻⁷.**

**Staying
involved in your
community**

**For individuals living with heart failure,
participating in community-based
activities is a good way to improve overall
well-being, connect with others,
and have fun⁸⁻¹².**

Maintaining strong connections with your loved ones



Maintaining healthy and happy connections with your loved ones is part of living a fulfilling life.

People living with heart failure who have good quality relationships with their loved ones tend to have better health and well-being⁴. Heart failure patients who are less socially isolated tend to have better mental health and take better care of themselves^{13,14}.



Research also shows that **heart failure patients are less likely to return to the hospital, live longer, and have fewer health problems when they have strong, supportive relationships with their caregivers¹³**. This demonstrates how strong relationships can support both heart and brain health.

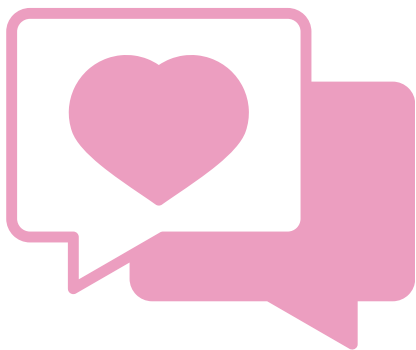
Maintaining strong connections with your loved ones



Our tips on how you can strengthen your relationships with your loved ones.

Tip #1: Practicing healthy communication

Our words are very powerful. What we choose to say makes a difference in how our lives play out. Since other people can't read our minds, communicating how we feel and what we think can help our loved ones understand us better.



Because talking about our feelings can be uncomfortable, **using a communication framework can help make it easier and give you a way to practice.**

An example of this the use of “I Statements” and that are paired with an open-ended question to get the conversation going¹⁵.

Maintaining strong connections with your loved ones



The goal of this model is to help people express themselves in a kind and compassionate way. Instead of blaming, guessing, or avoiding the person we're upset with, it encourages us to say how we feel. This also opens the floor for the other person to do the same.



Structuring “I Statements”¹⁵:

Feeling

Situation

**Brief
Explanation**

**Open-ended
question**

**The emotion
that
you are
experiencing**

**The event
that led you
to feel
this way**

**Sharing why
you are
feeling
this way**

**Asking others
to express
themselves**

Maintaining strong connections with your loved ones



“I Statements” touch on the principles of non-violent communication, which highlight **four important components** to mention during conversations¹⁶⁻¹⁸:

Observations: Objectively stating what is happening without placing any judgment.

Feelings: Expressing how we feel about what is happening.

Needs: What your requirements are regarding the situation and your feelings about it.

Requests: Asking for what you need.



An example of an I Statement hitting all 4 areas of non-violent communication:

I noticed that you didn't ask me how my heart failure appointment went.

This makes me feel disappointed because it makes it seem like I am all alone in dealing with my heart failure symptoms.

To help me adjust to my new diagnosis, I would like your love and support.

Can you please be more involved in my treatment journey?

Maintaining strong connections with your loved ones



“I Statements” can also be used to express positive emotions.

An example situation:

Sasha’s partner plans out their weekly schedule and ensures that all her heart failure-related tasks and appointments are listed in the calendar so they don’t forget anything.

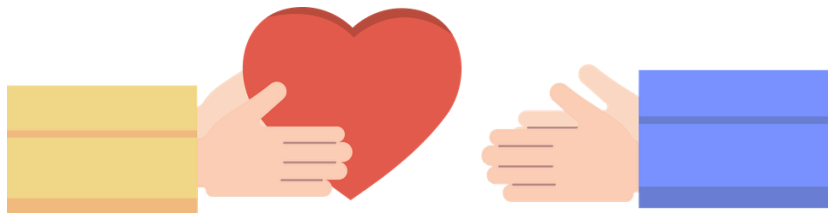
A possible response:

I feel so loved and supported when you add my doctor’s appointment to our kitchen calendar because it shows me that you care for my well-being.

What are some ways I can support you and your health?

Helpful Hints

Sharing that you felt good when your loved one did something can motivate them to continue doing things that make you happy.



To learn more about non-violent communication, check out this link¹⁸.

Maintaining strong connections with your loved ones



Tip #2: Find an activity you and your loved ones enjoy or can work on together

Research with older adults shows that engaging in meaningful, goal-oriented activities with others helps reduce feelings of social isolation. It works better than just doing passive activities together, such as watching TV¹⁴.



This might mean inviting them to complete a puzzle with you, where you both feel a sense of achievement, or even baking treats together for a family gathering for everyone to enjoy together.



Maintaining strong connections with your loved ones



Tip #3: Staying connected remotely

Even though staying connected is good for us, it can be hard to find the energy or motivation to make plans and be social¹⁴. Heart failure symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath, and mobility issues can make socializing more difficult. Luckily, staying connected remotely, such as through your phone, is still beneficial¹⁹.



Research shows that older adults who use their phones or tablets to talk with friends and family tend to feel more connected and supported¹⁹. They also find it enjoyable and meaningful to keep in touch in this way¹⁹. So, if you're not feeling up to meeting in person, connecting virtually, such as through a video call or phone call, are great ways to maintain strong relationships.

Helpful Hints

Some days you'll have more energy for higher-commitment activities, and other days you may need to step back and connect from home. Both are perfectly okay.

Leveraging the power of peer support



Humans are social beings, and the brain is a social organ^{5,6}.

This means we grow and function best when we feel connected to others. Social connection is so important to our overall health that some healthcare practitioners have started to engage in **social prescription, where they prescribe time for social connection and activities to their patients⁵.**



A research study on people living with heart failure found that peer support groups were very helpful and had a positive impact on their motivation to engage in heart failure self-care^{7,14}.



"The women peer group was stellar because you're talking with a bunch of people that have experienced [...] what you're experiencing [...] and [this program] had a very strong emphasis on the mental health side [of heart failure] [...]. I want to become one of those [program] facilitators because it helped me so much"

-Adult Living with Heart Failure, Ontario



Leveraging the power of peer support



Being part of a peer support group also helped people living with heart failure stay accountable towards making healthy lifestyle changes⁷.



The research also found that it was easier for heart failure patients to open up to peers who were living with their own set of health conditions⁷.

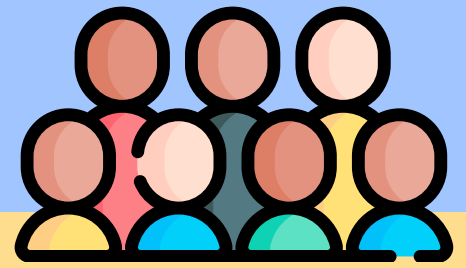
This is because these friends understood their heart failure experiences better⁷.

Helpful Hints

Consider joining a peer support group for people living with heart failure. If a weekly commitment doesn't suit your schedule, look for drop-in options instead. Many groups are also available online or through social media. If attending in person feels like too much, you can look into joining virtually.

To explore peer support group offerings near you, check out this link.

Staying involved in your community



According to psychology, love and belonging is a basic human need⁵.

When we feel like we're part of something bigger than ourselves, it can help us live life more fully⁵. Being part of a group can boost your health by helping you feel connected and less alone^{5,8}.



Community activities are a great way to meet others and do something you enjoy.

Examples of group-based activities are listed below.



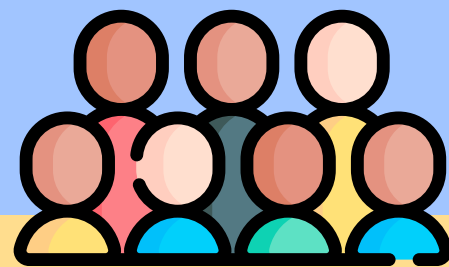
Aquatic Exercise

Also known as aqua fitness, aquatic exercise helps improve the quality of life of patients with stable heart failure⁹. **It can also boost exercise capacity and muscle strength⁹.**

For those who can't do land-based workouts, it's a safe and effective option⁹.



Staying involved in your community



Choral Singing

Research has found that singing in a choir can instill feelings of social support and inclusion, emotional well-being, a sense of accomplishment, and personal growth¹⁰. Among patients living with heart disease, participating in a choir led to improvements in their quality of life and their respiratory muscle strength¹¹.



Given that one cause of the reduced exercise capacity that heart failure patients experience is due to respiratory muscle weakness, singing in a choir is also a good way for heart failure patients to stay physically healthy¹¹.



Book Club

Older adults participating in shared reading activities had improvements in their social relationships and community support¹². It also supported their psychological health and well-being, including reducing their perceived stress¹².



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Daily Wellness

Everyday choices for a balanced lifestyle and optimal brain-heart health

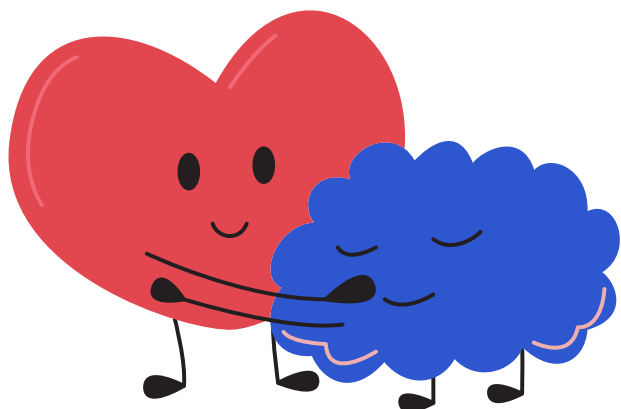


The choices that we make each day can bring us closer, to or farther from, our health goals.

A great deal of research points to the fact that our health is influenced by many lifestyle factors. **These lifestyle factors can affect how long we live and how we feel**, both physically and mentally¹⁻³.



Our heart health affects our brain health, and the daily decisions we make can help us live longer and healthier lives⁴.



Making healthy changes in areas like sleep, positive thinking, quitting smoking, drinking less alcohol, spending time in nature, and doing meaningful activities can **improve mental well-being for people with heart failure⁵⁻¹¹.**

Daily Wellness

Everyday choices for a balanced lifestyle and optimal brain-heart health



This section will walk you through each of these areas and show you ways to make more informed choices that will benefit your health in the long run.



“ I think the way I used to live was very unhealthy. And I think it [heart failure] was kind of a wake-up to say, hey, there's more to life than the way I was living. ”

-Adult Living with Heart Failure, Ontario



Sleeping Smart

Poor sleep makes it harder for patients to manage their heart failure and negatively impacts their mental health^{5,11}.

People living with heart failure who are more optimistic tend to have a higher quality of life¹². Activities that promote positive thinking can boost mental health of heart failure patients¹³.



Optimism



Addressing Harmful Habits

Tobacco use and alcohol consumption can harm the heart and brain health of people living with heart failure^{6,14,15}. It can also worsen mental health^{16,17} and heart failure symptoms¹⁸.

For people living with heart failure, spending time in nature can improve heart failure symptoms and heart function⁹. Time in nature also offers a place to destress, exercise, and connect with others^{19,20}.



Spending Time in Nature



Engaging in Meaningful Activities

Taking part in enjoyable activities that provide some purpose can boost mood and confidence, which support better heart failure management^{7,12,21}.

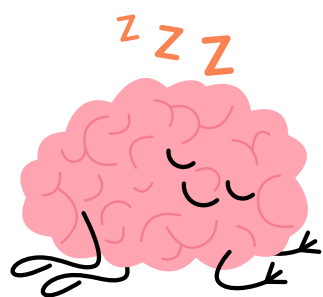
Sleeping Smart



When considering that **we spend one-third of our entire lives sleeping**, it becomes clear that having sufficient sleep is a fundamental part of living a healthy lifestyle^{22,23}. A good night's sleep is very important for our mental health^{3,10}. People who feel well-rested tend to have better control of their emotions, stronger brain function, and less anxiety and depression^{3,10}.

Poor sleep can worsen the physical and mental health of people living with heart failure²⁴. It is linked to:

- Worse heart failure symptoms²⁴.
- A lower quality of life^{5,24}.
- Increased risk of depression²⁴.
- Feelings of anger and irritation²⁴.
- Low levels of energy and motivation to complete daily tasks²⁴.
- Problems with brain function, such as concentration and memory²⁴.



What does it mean to have poor sleep?

Signs of poor quality sleep include waking up too early, feeling sleepy throughout the day, and experiencing fatigue²⁴. Poor quality of sleep also refers to experiencing issues falling asleep, staying asleep, or going back to sleep after waking up in the middle of the night^{5,24,27}.

Canadian experts recommend sleeping 7-9 hours per night for adults aged 18-64 and 7-8 hours per night for individuals 65 years of age and older^{25,26}.

Sleeping Smart



Poor sleep is common in people living with heart failure^{5,27}.

Symptoms like pain, trouble breathing, or waking up at night can make it hard to get enough rest, which makes it difficult to manage heart failure day to day⁵. **This underscores the importance of finding ways to engage in heart failure self-care.**



Mental health is another important factor that can influence sleep quality in people with heart failure



Poor sleep increases the risk of depression among people with heart failure, which can worsen sleep quality⁵. **Stress and sleep are interconnected:** poor sleep hinders stress management and increases feelings of anxiety, which then further impacts sleep quality.

The Canadian Cardiovascular Society recommends paying attention to sleep hygiene in heart failure patients⁶. Learn more about sleep health by clicking [here](#).

Research on sleep hygiene interventions among these patients found that those who learned strategies to overcome sleep challenges **experienced significantly better sleep quality and adopted habits conducive to good sleep¹¹.**

Sleeping Smart



Helpful Tips to Improve Your Sleeping Habits

Tip #1: Make a to-do list

Research shows that feelings of stress can impact our ability to get a good night's sleep²⁴. Feelings of stress can be triggered when you start thinking about your future tasks and responsibilities²⁸. If your brain starts racing with all the things you need to do just as you're trying to sleep, the stress can make it harder to fall asleep.



Try keeping a pen and notebook beside your bed.

If a thought comes to mind, write it down and remind yourself you can revisit it in the morning²⁸.

This reassurance can help you calm your mind and help you get into the relaxed state needed to get a good night's sleep²⁸.



Tip #2: Avoid stressful situations before bed

Finding yourself in stressful situations before bed can impact your sleep²⁹⁻³¹. **In the evening, do your best to avoid scrolling on social media^{30,31} or discussing serious or heavy topics with loved ones²⁹ so that you can get a more restful sleep.**

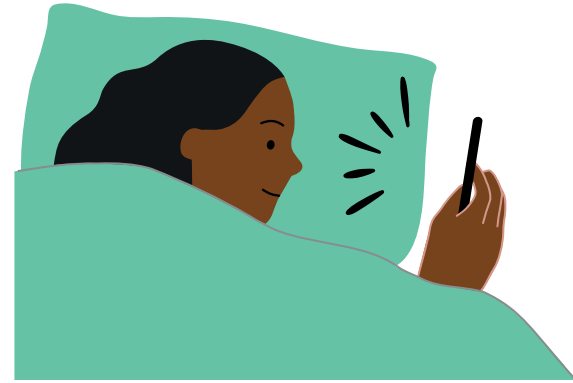
Sleeping Smart



Tip #3: Mind the light

Exposure to bright lights before sleep can impact melatonin, the hormone our brain produces to help us get a restful sleep^{11,29}.

Blackout curtains, sleep masks, dimming the lights and putting your devices away 30-60 minutes before bed can help signal your brain that it is bedtime^{11,29}.



Tip #4: Relax your mind

Creating a relaxing bedtime routine is an important step in preparing your body and mind for quality sleep. Ideas for this include meditating, reading a book, gratitude journaling and stretching^{11,29,30}. [Check out this link to learn more about gratitude and heart failure.](#)



Tip #5: Dedicate your bedroom to your sleep

Using your room for tasks other than sleep can affect your sleep³⁰. Avoid watching TV, using devices, working, and eating food while sitting in your bed. **When your brain knows that your bed is only for sleep, it can help you get to sleep faster³⁰.**



Optimism

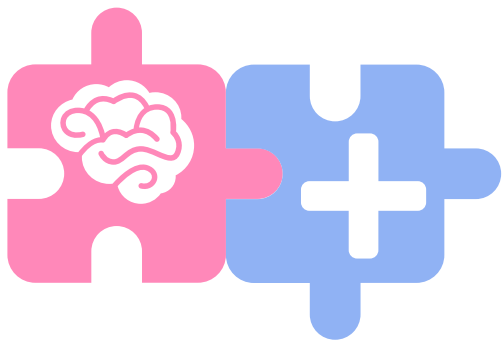


Heart failure patients are more likely to experience a poor quality of life due to their higher risk of anxiety and depression^{12,32-35}.

Along with low quality of life, experiencing anxiety and depression can lead to worse health outcomes for heart failure patients^{12,33}.



Adopting an optimistic mindset can help offset this¹².



Research conducted by experts from the **University of Ottawa Heart Institute** found that heart failure patients who demonstrated higher levels of positive thinking, including optimism and positive emotions, **had a much higher quality of life and better well-being¹².**

Another study found that activities to improve positive thinking, such as practicing gratitude and participating in activities that bring enjoyment and meaning to one's life **led to improvements in heart failure self-care and anxiety an increase in feelings of happiness and levels of optimism¹³**



Optimism



It is natural and sometimes easier to dwell on negative things even when positive things have happened³⁶. But, if we think of negative thoughts as a snowball: if it keeps rolling, it will only grow bigger.

Therefore, adopting healthy ways of thinking is an important way to live well with heart failure. Here are some tips that can help!

Tip #1: Keeping track of the good



Keep a journal, either in a notebook or on your phone. **When something good happens to you, write it down.** On days when you're feeling a bit down, revisit the list of good things. By practicing it regularly, you will develop a more optimistic outlook on life. To learn more, [check out this link.](#)

Tip #2: Add rhythm to your life

Make a playlist of your favourite songs. When you need a boost to your mood, play a few of them. Research shows that **listening to enjoyable music can help improve the mental and physical well-being** of people living with heart failure³⁷.



Addressing harmful habits

Aiming to live a **good quality of life** as a heart failure patient **also involves choosing to avoid or reduce harmful habits** that can impact your physical and mental well-being.

These include alcohol consumption and tobacco use.

Alcohol and Heart Health

Heart experts agree that heavy drinking (more than 1 or 2 alcoholic drinks a day) is bad for your heart^{6,38}. This is because alcohol can damage the heart's muscle¹⁴.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada warns against alcohol, saying that it can raise blood pressure and interfere with heart failure medication¹⁵.

The Canadian Cardiovascular Society recommends that⁶:

- All heart failure patients limit their alcohol intake.
- If alcohol was one of the factors that led to a patient's heart failure, then that patient should avoid drinking altogether.



Canadian guidelines make it clear that no amount or type of alcohol is good for our health. However, if you chose to drink, they say that less is better³⁸. This would be less than 1-2 standard drinks per week. To learn about this, [check out this link](#).

“ I won't look back because I'd rather live than smoke, and also, I used to drink quite often, too. I've changed my whole lifestyle and stopped all the [smoking and drinking] [...]

The muscles weaken and [...] I'm sure that [my lifestyle] had to do with [my heart failure]. It's for you to see and admit [...]

”

-Adult Living with Heart Failure, Ontario

Addressing harmful habits

Alcohol and mental health

In addition to harming our heart health, **alcohol can also negatively impact our mental health.** Research shows that the use of alcohol and illicit drugs can worsen symptoms of anxiety and depression, hinder cognitive function, and increase the risk of developing mental health disorders³³.



What research has found is that the patients who received the message that moderate drinking can be good for the heart **were at a higher risk of taking part in hazardous drinking patterns**³⁰.

Our Recommendation

It is important to limit alcohol intake and avoid heavy drinking. Replace alcoholic beverages with healthier options such as water and fruit smoothies.



If you choose to drink, be cautious!

Make sure you speak with your healthcare provider to understand the potential risks and harms.

Addressing harmful habits

Smoking and Heart Failure



Heart experts say that avoiding cigarette smoking is an important way to help manage heart failure without medicine or medical devices⁶. This is because **many studies show that smoking harms the heart⁶**.

Research shows that people with heart failure who keep smoking after their diagnosis have worse health outcomes. These include:

-  higher risk of mortality^{18,39}
-  greater risk of getting readmitted to the hospital^{18,39}
-  lower quality of life¹⁸
-  worse heart failure symptoms¹⁸
-  lower physical and social functioning¹⁸



Mental health and cigarette smoking

Research shows that people who smoke cigarettes are at a higher risk of developing mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety disorders, and substance use^{17,40}. For people with existing mental health issues, cigarette smoking can worsen their symptoms⁴¹.

Addressing harmful habits

The choice to quit smoking can lead to significant heart and mental health benefits

- **Canadian Cardiovascular Society** says that quitting smoking, no matter the age, is associated with longer longevity⁴².
- Quitting smoking can also lead to **significant decreases in depression, anxiety, and stress, and increase quality of life**^{17,40}.



For heart failure patients who smoke, taking part in smoking cessation strategies is very beneficial to improving their mental health, quality of life, and heart failure-specific outcomes³⁹.

Our Recommendation

If you have a history of cigarette smoking and/or find it hard to quit smoking, talk to your healthcare provider about what you can do to reduce your risk and live a healthier life.

[If it feels right for you, check out this link to explore smoking cessation programs near you.](#)

Spending time in nature



Research shows that spending time in green spaces is good for heart health²⁰.

People who spend more time in nature tend to have less stress, depression, and anxiety^{9,43}. Green spaces can also lower blood pressure, improve sleep and brain health, increase physical activity, and give people a break, exercise, and social time^{19,20}. For people living with heart failure, time in nature can help improve symptoms and heart function⁹.



Since spending time in nature can bring lots of benefits, here are some tips on how to get outdoors more:

Tip #1: Take your plans outside

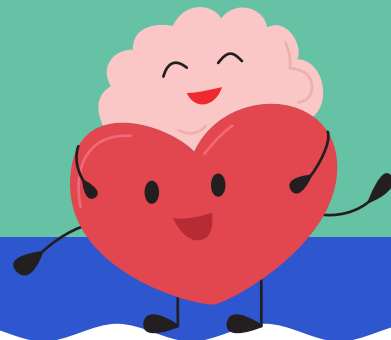
When planning on meeting up with loved ones, suggest outdoor activities. For example, instead of lunch at a restaurant, see if your loved ones are willing to have a picnic at the park.



Tip #2: Pair your favourite activity with a green space

If you enjoy reading, see if you can find a green space that has a bench where you can sit and read. If you enjoy arts and crafts, such as colouring or drawing, try bringing that to a picnic bench at your local park.

Engaging in meaningful activities



Along with paying attention to what we eat, how we move our bodies, taking part in activities that we enjoy is an important part of heart failure self-care and improving our overall mental health.

According to psychology:

Humans need to be engaged in the world around them and have a sense of purpose^{7,21}.

We want to be interested in the activities.

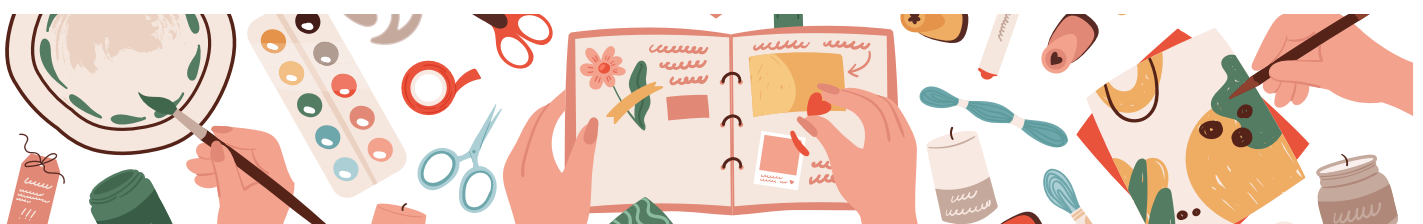
When we feel like we are doing well and have control over the decisions we make and the actions we take, **we feel better and are more confident, both of which are very important for managing heart failure**^{8,12}.



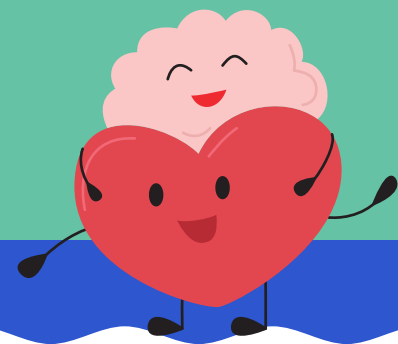
Tips for enjoying life, living well, and feeling fulfilled!

Tip #1: Make your happiness a priority

Reflect on what makes you happy and ways you can incorporate this into your life. As an example, if there is a cause that you are passionate about, look into opportunities in your community to support it and make a difference.



Engaging in meaningful activities



Tip 2: Get inspired by what has worked for others living with heart failure

Reading, completing word searches, and spending time with pets are some activities that people living with heart failure have found enjoyable. Try one or more of them out and see if you also have fun with them.

If it works for them, it can also work for you.

Tip 3: Learn something new

Think about something you have always wanted to learn and make a plan! This can be as simple as trying out a new recipe, or even something more challenging like learning a new language or instrument.

Learning a new skill can give us a sense of accomplishment.



“So I read, I do word searches, color, spend time with my pets [...] I find my animals really bring me peace and joy and help me through those tougher moments.”

-Patient Living with Heart Failure, Ontario

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