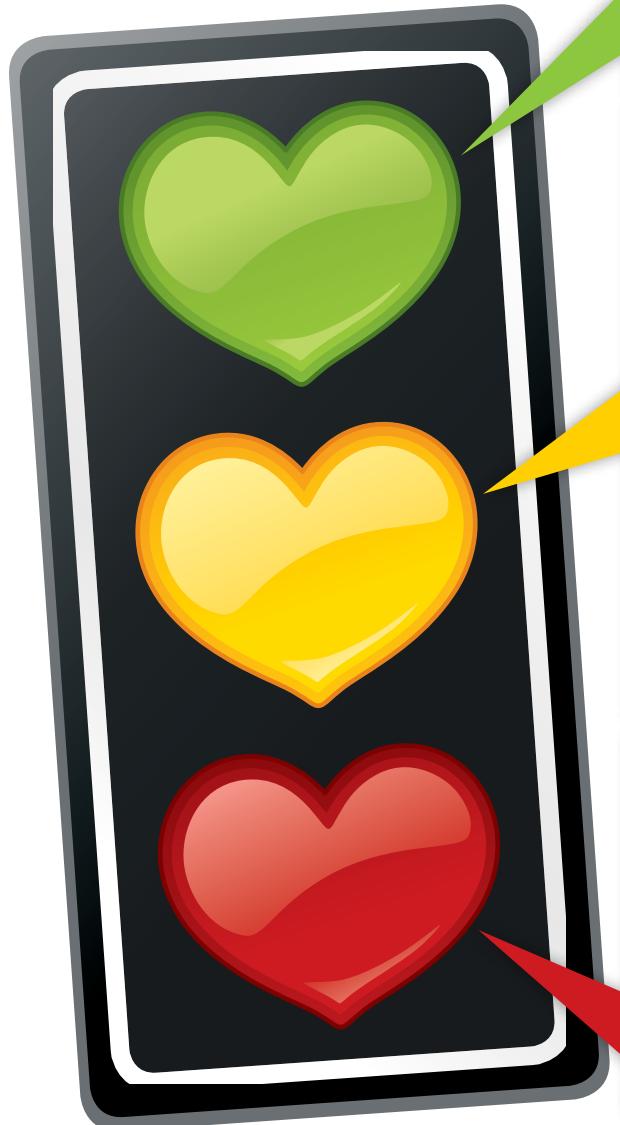


# Heart Failure Lights

Your daily guide to living with Heart Failure



## EACH DAY - As part of your daily routine:

Make sure you **take the tablets for your heart**.

**When you get up in the morning, weigh yourself** after going to the toilet for the first time. Write this down and **compare it to yesterday's weight**.

**Eat food which is low in salt and low in sodium.** Avoid using low salt alternatives.

**Check for swelling** in your feet, ankles, legs and tummy.

Ask yourself if your **breathing pattern is the same as normal**.

Balance exercise and rest; **know your limits**.



## GREEN - Your condition is stable if...

Your weight is stable.

Your appetite remains the same.

You have no new or increased swelling in your feet, ankles, legs or tummy.

Your breathing pattern is the same as it normally is.

You have no chest pain.

You do not feel more tired than usual.

## AMBER - Contact your Heart Failure Nurse or GP if...

Your weight has suddenly increased within the last few days (by 2 to 3 pounds overnight or more than 5 pounds in a week).

You have lost your appetite.

Your feet, ankles, legs or tummy are more swollen than usual.

You feel more breathless than usual.

You need extra pillows to prop yourself up in bed in order to help you breathe more easily.

Your breathing is causing you to have a restless night's sleep.

You have started coughing more than normal.

You are feeling, or have recently felt, palpitations or flutters in your chest.

You have had to use your GTN or Nitroglycerin spray to relieve an episode of chest pain on more than one occasion.

You feel more tired than usual and are sleeping a lot more.

Your Heart Failure Nurse is:

Telephone:

## RED - Seek Help. You need to phone 999 and ask for an ambulance immediately if...

You have ongoing pains in your chest or perhaps your arms, back, or jaw, for more than 15 minutes despite using your glyceryl trinitrate spray (GTN/Nitroglycerin) spray.

The pain is making you feel sick, clammy, sweaty, or breathless.

You are finding it hard to breathe even when you are sitting down.

You have suddenly started to feel confused; things are not clear or making sense.

**If you are admitted to hospital, it is important that you, a family member or carer contacts your Heart Failure Nurse during your stay.**

# 'THE BEST APPROACH TO MANAGING YOUR HEART FAILURE IS A COMBINATION OF BOTH MEDICAL TREATMENTS AND LIFESTYLE ADJUSTMENTS'. HERE ARE SOME TOP TIPS . . .

## 'MANAGE YOUR MEDICINES'

Managing your medicines will help you manage your symptoms better which could help you to breathe better, have more energy to increase your activity levels and reduce fluid retention.

There are various medications designed to alleviate the symptoms of Heart Failure. Make an effort to know what you are taking, why you are taking them, and any potential side-effects.

### 3 Common drug groups are:

**DIURETICS (or water tablets)** – They help your kidneys get rid of excess fluid and salt by making you pass more urine. This helps to relieve swelling and breathlessness.

**ACE-INHIBITORS** – These relax your blood vessels, making it easier for your heart to pump blood through them. They can also slow down the rate at which your symptoms may get worse.

**BETA-BLOCKERS** – These can make your heart muscle work better by slowing the heart rate. This reduces the amount of work the heart has to do and can prevent your condition from getting worse.

It may be useful to keep a list of all your medications, the dosages, and when you take them.

## 'GET THE JAB'

Both Flu and Pneumonia can increase the risk of complications for people with Heart Failure.

Vaccination is recommended for any individual with a serious medical condition.

Your doctor or nurse should offer you the Flu vaccine on a yearly basis. Contact them directly if you have any concerns about the vaccine or if you have not been offered it.

## Your daily guide to living with Heart Failure

This leaflet was collaboratively developed by:

**GM CLAHRC** –  
[www.clahrc-gm.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.clahrc-gm.nihr.ac.uk)

### **Pumping Marvellous**

(Heart Failure Charity no.1145140)  
[www.pumpingmarvellous.org](http://www.pumpingmarvellous.org)

With thanks to the Heart Failure Specialist Nurse Team at Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust and Tameside Hospital NHS Trust

[www.pat.nhs.uk](http://www.pat.nhs.uk)

[www.tamesidehospital.nhs.uk](http://www.tamesidehospital.nhs.uk)

## 'WEIGHT – WATCHING'

A sudden increase in weight could mean that there is a build-up of too much fluid in your body.

Weigh yourself every morning after you get up before you have breakfast.

Keep a record. If your weight increases by 2-3 pounds (1Kg) in a day you may be building up fluid. Keep an eye out for any swelling or breathlessness.

If you put on 5 pounds (2.5kgs) over 3 days or you develop other symptoms you should contact your nurse or doctor.

Sometimes you may be advised to restrict your fluid intake to a set amount. This can help to alleviate your symptoms.

Remember, many foods also contain water.

Keep an eye on your general fluid intake, and always follow advice from your specialist.

In general, if you are overweight, your heart has to work harder to pump blood around your body. Keeping to a healthy weight will help your symptoms and reduce the risk of health problems.

## 'DIET & ALCOHOL . . . YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT'

Drinking too much alcohol may damage your heart muscle. Current guidelines are that you should not drink more than:

**WOMEN = 1-2 units/day      MEN = 2-3 units/day**

**1 unit =** small glass of wine / ½ Pint of Lager/Bitter/Cider

Eat a well-balanced diet, cut down on saturated fats and eat at least 5 portions of fruit or veg a day.

Consider lower fat versions of your dairy foods, and eat more starchy food such as bread, rice, pasta, potato.

Be aware of your portion sizes. You could visit:

[www.nhs.uk/livewell/5ADay/pages/portionsizes.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/5ADay/pages/portionsizes.aspx)

If you are overweight your heart has to work harder. Eating healthy will help you to feel better and lose weight. Further support and information is available at:

[www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet)

## 'MANAGING YOUR SIGNS & SYMPTOMS'

Medication and self-management can go a long way to improving your quality of life but your Heart Failure can always potentially become unstable. More often than not this may be due to a build-up of fluid in your body.

### **Signs that your condition may be unstable include:**

- Increased breathlessness
- Reduced exercise tolerance
- Frequently waking at night due to breathlessness
- Needing more pillows at night to sleep comfortably
- Increased swelling of your legs or ankles
- Worsening cough
- Worsening dizziness

If you develop any of these symptoms contact your doctor or nurse, and follow the Heart Failure Traffic Lights guide.

## 'CUT OUT THE SALT'

All food has salt in it naturally so you don't need to add it. Low salt or low sodium? Your doctor or nurse may refer to either when discussing your diet. It is the sodium content within the salt that must be reduced to help your condition.

Some food labels often list sodium content as well as salt. Up to 70% of the sodium we eat each day is 'hidden' in the food that might not taste salty.

Too much salt can raise your blood pressure which leads to additional strain on your heart.

It can also cause your body to retain water, increasing the likelihood of swelling and breathlessness.

A lower salt intake can help you feel better, and allow your medications to work better.

## 'EXERCISE & ACTIVITY'

Moderate exercise can be beneficial to your heart.

It can improve your energy, stamina, and fitness.

This may help improve your symptoms, and your ability to cope with them.

Moderate aerobic activity such as walking or cycling is recommended.

You may be invited to a cardiac rehabilitation program following a hospital stay. These aim to support you to improve your fitness through a structured path with realistic goals. Your GP may be able to refer you to such.

If any activity is leading to more breathlessness than usual, or if you feel unwell or are in pain, slow down and stop. Then tell your doctor or nurse what has happened.

## 'SMOKING'

If you smoke, stopping smoking is the single most important thing you can do to live longer.

Smoking can deprive the heart of vital oxygen, and make the heart beat faster, raising the blood pressure for a short time after each cigarette.

Stopping will reduce the workload on your heart and help improve your symptoms.

There is a lot of help and support available from stop-smoking groups or nicotine replacement products.

Talk to your doctor or nurse, or you may wish to visit:

[www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk)

[www.quit.org.uk](http://www.quit.org.uk)

Alternatively you can ring the NHS smoking helpline:  
**0800 022 4232**

## 'USEFUL LINKS PROVIDING FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES TO PEOPLE WITH HEART FAILURE'

1. [clahrc-gm.nihr.ac.uk/heartfailure](http://clahrc-gm.nihr.ac.uk/heartfailure)
2. [Pumpingmarvellous.org](http://Pumpingmarvellous.org)
3. [bhf.org.uk](http://bhf.org.uk)
4. [bsh.org.uk](http://bsh.org.uk)
5. [heartfailurematters.org](http://heartfailurematters.org)