Heart failure is a chronic disease. You will need to manage it the rest of your life. With treatment, a failing heart can become stronger. Medicines can help you feel better and have a longer, more productive life. Treatment also includes managing the underlying cause of your heart failure. Your doctor will work on a plan that is right for you.

You will play a large part in the success of your treatment. Taking medicine or having an operation is not enough to keep your body functioning at its best. You will need to make changes in the way you live every day. These are the lifestyle changes you need to help manage the symptoms of heart failure. You will feel better and be able to do more. These lifestyle changes are proven to be effective.

**Eat less sodium.**
Limit your salt intake. Too much salt could cause swelling and could make it harder for you to breathe. Use a salt substitute only if your doctor permits.

**Drink less fluid.**
You may need to limit how much fluid you drink. Remember, anything that melts like ice cream, Jello, or ice still counts as fluid.

**Weigh yourself every day.**
Weight gain can be a sign that you are retaining fluid even if you have no other symptoms. Put your scale on a hard surface. Weigh yourself every day when you wake up but after you have used the bathroom. Wear the same amount of clothing. Record your weight on the chart provided at the back of this manual. Call your doctor if you gain 5 pounds in 3 days. You should also call your doctor if you lose 5 pounds in 3 days.

**Be physically active.**
A little movement every day helps to strengthen your heart. By keeping your muscles in shape and conditioned, your heart will not have to work as hard to provide oxygen to the muscles. Walking is a safe and healthy activity. Follow your doctor’s instructions about exercise and activity.

**Do not smoke or use other tobacco products.**
Using tobacco is the single most dangerous thing you can do to your body. Nicotine robs your heart of oxygen and constricts the blood vessels. This raises your heart rate and blood pressure.

**Avoid drinking alcohol.**
Learn the early warning signs of heart failure and tell your doctor.
Call your doctor any time you notice a change in your body, but especially be aware of the following:

- difficulty breathing during normal activities, during sleep, or when you rest
- gain or lose 5 pounds in 3 days
- swelling in your feet
- developing a cough
- stomach pain
- feeling more tired than usual

**Take your medicine.**
You must take your medicine every day. Be
sure to take it exactly as prescribed. Skipping doses or not refilling a prescription could cause serious problems. Do not stop taking your medicine without talking to your doctor.

**Keep a current list of your medicines with you.**
Include all over-the-counter medicines and herbals. Do not take over-the-counter medicines without first talking with your doctor.

**Visit your doctor regularly.**
Your doctor needs to see you and talk with you on a regular basis. The result will be better treatment. It can prevent trips to the hospital.

**Maintain a healthy body weight.**
Ask your doctor or dietitian the weight that is right for you. Extra body weight makes your heart work harder. Exercise and a healthy diet will help you keep an ideal body weight.

**Limit stress.**
When you are anxious or upset, your heart beats faster and you breathe more heavily. Find ways to reduce stress such as deep breathing exercises, reading a book, laughing with someone, watching a good movie, or praying.

**Get annual immunizations.**
Protect yourself from the flu and pneumonia. Getting a cold, flu, or other infections adds to the extra work your heart already has to do. This means you can get much sicker than you normally would. It could take longer for you to get better.