



Heart Failure Management:

The Key Person is You



Jan Geertsema, ARNP

There is an estimated 5.3 million people in the United States living with heart failure, and as technology and treatment improves, this number will continue to rise. The

trend in cost for heart failure patients is, in large part, related to the incidence of hospital readmission. Patients with heart failure comprise one-tenth of the Medicare population, but account for one third of all Medicare spending. In 2008, the estimated hospital costs were 34.8 billion.

Despite the ability to track the cost of caring for heart failure patients, little is known about why heart failure patients are readmitted in the first place. This lack of information prompted a study at the Mayo Clinic. This study investigated over 1,000 patients and their history of hospitalizations after being diagnosed with heart failure. The results were surprising and speak to the importance of the patients' ability to understand their own medical problems and provide self-care.

The study confirmed high hospital admission rates in patients with heart failure; 83 percent of the patients had at least one hospital readmission within the next 4.7 years after their diagnosis of heart failure. More than half required three or more hospitalizations. However, less than 17 percent of those hospitalizations could be directly

attributed to heart failure. This suggests that repeat hospitalizations in patients with heart failure may not necessarily signal a failure in heart failure care, but rather highlight the complex nature of the patient's multiple medical problems (i.e. diabetes, lung disease, bone and joint problems.)

Patients who practice above average self-care management in all aspects of medical care had fewer admissions and problems. They also identified a higher quality of life in a recent University of Pennsylvania study. So what does self-care mean? In self-care management, you are a "partner" with your healthcare team. This partnership involves all of your medical problems and may involve multiple physicians. Communication with your healthcare team is essential. Once you have taken an active role in managing your illness, you and your doctor can work together to set goals that will lead to better health. For example, identify a problem area, develop a specific plan to meet your goal, assess your confidence level, and follow up. As a patient in the heart failure program, you are already well on your way to self-care management. Studies suggest applying this process to all of your medical problems will benefit your overall health and potentially reduce hospitalizations.

Exercising Safely

As part of our team, we want you to exercise 5-7 times per week for 20-30 minutes. Please keep in mind there are special things to consider:

STOP exercising if you have any of the following symptoms: Excessive sweating; a fast heart rate; skips in your heart beat which are different than usual; discomfort in your chest, teeth, jaw, or arms; shortness of breath; dizziness; lightheadedness; nausea; blurred vision; or cramps in your arms or legs.



Connie Wessels,
RN, MSN

WAIT at least 45 minutes to one hour after meals before exercising. Allow time for your food to be digested before making more demands on your heart by exercising. Do not eat immediately after exercising; wait at least 30 minutes.

DRESS COMFORTABLY, as you may expect to sweat. Jogging shoes are great for walking.

DON'T EXERCISE OUTDOORS if the temperature is above 80 degrees or the humidity is 75 percent or more. This will place extra strain on your heart and circulation. If you are unable to exercise outdoors, walk in air conditioned places. Use exercise equipment indoors. Be creative!

EXTREME FEELINGS (anxiety, happiness, anger, sadness) may affect blood pressure and heart rate. Do not exercise during this time.

KEEP A LOG of your exercise routine. This seems to help keep people exercising more.

Heart Failure Education & Support Group

Margaret Jungers, OSF will present
"Benefits of Tai Chi and Exploring its Movements"

Wednesday, August 18

2:00 – 3:30 p.m. Registration at 1:45

Mercy Medical Center, 6th Floor Auditorium

Call 584-3232 to register

Sticking to Your Healthy Lifestyle

Summer is a busy time filled with food, family, friends, and vacations. For some, it can lead you astray from the healthy lifestyle you maintain throughout the year. So how can we make sure to follow our same healthy ways all year long?



Sara Nicolaus, PharmD

Here are some easy steps to follow:

- Discuss your diet with your registered dietician.
- Keep track of your weight by weighing yourself everyday and writing it in a daily weight chart. Use this to tell your doctor if there are any sudden changes in your weight.
- Try to avoid alcohol, but if you choose to drink, have no more than one drink a day. One drink is equivalent to one glass of wine or beer, or a mixed drink with no more than one ounce of alcohol.
- Maintain your exercise plan. Even though exercising outside may be too hot, try walking around a mall or store with some friends.
- Relax and enjoy the summer and spend time with loved ones.

Special Tips for Sticking to Your Medications

- Continue to take your medications daily. Carry a pillbox and set it where you will see it everyday. A few good examples are: by your toothbrush, on the table where you eat breakfast, or next to your bed.
- Going on a long trip? Ask your pharmacist if you can get a larger supply of medication this month or fill it a little early. They can request a “vacation override,” from your insurance company. This lets the company know you will be out of town and allows you to refill some prescriptions early. Although this does not work with every prescription plan, it is worth asking your pharmacist.
- Continue to watch for unwanted side effects of your medications. If you have any concerns please bring it up with your pharmacist or doctor.

Ask your pharmacist! We are here to answer your questions. We can make sure you understand what your prescriptions are for and how to use them.

Become a Savvy Farmer's Market Shopper

Farmer's markets are becoming more commonplace in neighborhoods around the country, and with the increase in popularity has come an increase in vendors and consumer choices. Because fresh fruits and vegetables are naturally low in sodium, farmer's markets can be a great way to add variety to your sodium restricted diet.

When it comes to buying vegetables, start small. Buy salad ingredients to have at dinner each night. Purchase vegetables you know how to prepare. Once you gain confidence, add new items. Also search for staples you'd normally buy at the supermarket like eggs, flour, bread, coffee, fish, nuts, seeds, honey and even soap.

Since items at a farmer's market change often, bring a general shopping list rather than a specific one for the whole week; ingredients for salads, produce for side dishes that go well with planned dinners of fish, chicken or meat entrees. To prevent rotting fruit in the fridge, estimate how many pieces of fruit you'll need for your lunches all week.

Here are more ideas on how to maximize your trip to the farmer's market:

- **Don't be shy.** The people selling products want to answer your questions, so go ahead and ask them what sun chokes are.
- **Learn the lingo.** Not all farmers can afford the organic certification, so ask them the difference between “greenhouse grown” and “grown or raised without hormones.” You'll become a savvier shopper at any store after learning from the experts.
- **Do your homework.** Find a market that's in a convenient location and with hours that fit your schedule so you can easily add a shopping trip into your weekly routine. Visit www.localharvest.org for markets in your area.
- **Time your outing.** If you can only go on weekends, get there early. Otherwise, go on a weekday in the middle of the day. The less traffic in the market, the more opportunities you'll have to get the best products and chat with vendors. If you're shopping on a budget, going at the end of the market day will usually enable you to get some great deals and negotiate prices with the vendors.
- **Bring cash and reusable bags.** Small bills will make transactions easy and you'll need a sturdy, eco-friendly bag to carry your purchases home.
- **Be flexible.** Accept that produce will not look perfect, but it has been grown naturally and picked recently. This means it's packed with flavor and nutrients.



Information provided by Julie Negrin, MS, CN and the American Dietetic Association's Hunger and Environmental Nutrition dietetic practice group.