



Heart Failure: Making Changes to Your Diet

You have a condition called heart failure. It is also known as congestive heart failure, or CHF. When you have heart failure, excess fluid is more likely to build up in your body. This makes the heart work harder to pump blood. Fluid buildup causes symptoms such as shortness of breath and edema (swelling). Controlling the amount of salt (sodium) you eat may help stop fluid from building up. Your doctor may also tell you to reduce the amount of fluid you drink.

Reading Food Labels

Your healthcare provider will tell you how much sodium you can eat each day. Read food labels to keep track. Keep in mind that certain foods are high in salt. These include canned, frozen, and processed foods. Check the amount of sodium in each serving. Watch out for high-sodium ingredients. These include MSG (monosodium glutamate), baking soda, and sodium phosphate.

Eating Less Salt

Give yourself time to get used to eating less salt. It may take a little while. Here are some tips to help:

- Take the saltshaker off the table. Replace it with salt-free herb mixes and spices.
- Eat fresh or plain frozen vegetables. These have much less salt than canned vegetables.
- Choose low-sodium snacks like sodium-free pretzels, crackers, or air-popped popcorn.
- Don't add salt to your food when you're cooking. Instead, season your foods with pepper, lemon, garlic, or onion.
- When you eat out, ask that your food be cooked without added salt.



If You're Told to Limit Fluid

You may need to limit fluid intake to help prevent edema. This includes anything that is liquid at room temperature, such as ice cream and soup. If your doctor tells you to limit fluid, try these tips:

- Measure drinks in a measuring cup before you drink them. This will help you meet daily goals.
- Chill drinks to make them more refreshing.
- Suck on frozen lemon wedges to quench thirst.
- Only drink when you're thirsty.
- Chew sugarless gum or suck on hard candy to keep your mouth moist.

When to Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor right away if you have any symptoms of worsening heart failure. These can include:

- Sudden weight gain
- Increased swelling of your legs or ankles
- Trouble breathing when you're resting or at night

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