Heart Failure Matters

STAYING HEALTHY

What can you do to enjoy a healthy winter?

Wash Your Hands
Handwashing is one of the most important things you can do to stop the spread of germs and stay healthy. Wash your hands regularly to protect yourself against colds, flu and diarrheal illnesses. The CDC recommends following five simple steps for effective handwashing: Wet your hands well. Lather up (don’t forget the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails). Scrub thoroughly (at least 20 seconds—or “Happy Birthday” twice through). Rinse well. Dry with a clean towel or air dry.

Get Your Exercise
Regular exercise can help boost your immune system and reduce your risk of illness. People with heart failure need physical activity as much as anyone else. How much activity and what kinds of activity you can do depends on the level of your heart health. Talk to your healthcare provider about an appropriate physical activity plan.

Rest Up
Good sleep is the foundation of good health. Quality sleep allows your body time to rest and recover. Poor sleep not only leads to daytime fatigue (making it more difficult to exercise and engage in other healthy behaviors), it can also have a detrimental effect on heart health. Most adults need about seven to eight hours of sleep.

Get Vaccinated
A yearly flu vaccine is the most important step in protecting yourself against flu viruses. People with heart failure need to have a pneumococcal (Pneumovax) vaccine. If you are younger than 65 when you receive the vaccine, you will need to get another dose when you are 65 or older (as long as it’s been at least five years since your previous dose). In addition, you should have one dose of Prevnar (PCV13)—another kind of pneumonia vaccine) after you turn 65.

Seek Medical Care Early
If you do become ill, know when to seek medical care. Being sick can make your heart failure harder to control. Talk with your provider before you get sick and make a sick-day plan. If you have unexpected weight gain or find yourself short of breath, a call and visit to your provider may help you avoid a trip to the emergency room and hospitalization.

Fall prevention

Falls are a leading cause of injury in adults ages 65 or older. A fall could limit your activity and keep you from living independently. However, many falls can be prevented. Regular physical activity builds leg strength and improves balance. Sturdy shoes help prevent slips and trips. Removing obstacles, securing loose rugs, and installing handrails will reduce the risk of falling at home. If you have been experiencing falls or difficulties with balance, talk to your provider about additional fall prevention strategies. For a complete home safety checklist, visit everettclinic.com/HomeSafety.
Smoking cessation

If you smoke, quitting is one of the best things you can do to improve your heart failure symptoms. Each time you smoke, your heart rate and blood pressure increase for a short time and your heart and brain are robbed of needed oxygen (due to carbon monoxide). Smoking also decreases your tolerance for physical activity and increases the tendency for your blood to clot.

Tips for quitting:

- Set a quit date and mark it on your calendar.
- Enlist the support of your family and friends.
- Write down all of the reasons why you want to quit.
- Try to avoid the social situations that make you want to smoke.
- Keep something nearby to occupy your hands.
- If you slip up, get right back on track. Think about why you smoked.
- Get physically active to help reduce cravings.
- Carry healthy snacks (such as carrots, unsalted nuts, and sugarless gum) to pop into your mouth when you feel the urge to smoke.

If you feel like you need more help to quit, talk to your healthcare provider about medications that can help you stop smoking.

Holiday Eating

Eating a balanced diet can help prevent illness and speed recovery—but the focus on heavy meals and sweet treats during the holidays can derail the best healthy eating intentions. However, if you plan ahead, you can enjoy the holidays without compromising your health.

- **Bring a dish.** Contribute to the holiday buffet with a healthy dish you enjoy.
- **Eat a healthy snack prior to an event.** Eat a snack if your holiday event is not at your regularly scheduled meal time (skipping meals can make it harder to manage your blood sugar). A pre-event snack will also reduce your risk of overindulging at the party.
- **Plan your plate.** Divide your plate: fill 1/2 with veggies, 1/4 with lean protein and 1/4 with starches (carbohydrates) such as sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes or rice.
- **Monitor sodium intake.** Try to avoid fried foods and limit your intake of other high-salt foods (such as breads, crackers, cold cuts, cured meats, pizza and poultry).

- **Mindful eating.** Be selective. Study all of the food options and choose the foods that you enjoy the most. Have smaller portions, and take the time to savor your selections.
- **Drink water.** Replace high-calorie holiday beverages and alcohol with calorie-free drinks like water, tea or seltzer.
- **Try healthier versions of your favorite holiday foods.** Many recipes can be revised to accommodate special dietary needs. Steam or roast vegetables instead of sautéing in butter, substitute fat-free or low-fat dairy products for the full-fat versions and try replacing salt with herbs and spices. Find new recipes on the American Heart Association website (heart.org).