

Caring for Health

Resources for family caregivers

Care for you
so you can
care for them

When the diagnosis is congestive heart failure

Caregivers can help loved ones living with congestive heart failure (CHF) take steps to manage symptoms and keep the condition from becoming more serious.

People with CHF may not be able to do the things they've normally done – often a tough adjustment. As a caregiver, you also may have questions about how CHF will affect your loved one: What do I do? How can I help? What changes do we need to make?

Here are some lifestyle practices that may make a big difference in the quality of life of the person you care for. Be sure to discuss them with your loved one's doctor(s).

Watch weight. Help your loved one weigh himself or herself daily, preferably in the morning, and keep a record. A sudden increase of more than two or three pounds may mean fluid buildup and a call to the doctor.

Lower sodium. Limit sodium (salt) intake to less than 1,500 mg a day. If you're preparing meals, don't add salt when cooking.

Exercise. Exercise, with the doctor's OK, is important for patients with stable conditions. Staying fit can help your loved one's condition from getting worse.¹

Bed rest. If your loved one has severe heart failure and needs bed rest, elevate his or her upper body to reduce congestion in the lungs. Resting in an armchair may be better than lying in bed. Relaxing and contracting leg muscles help prevent clots.



Manage medicines. An important part of helping someone manage CHF is managing multiple medicines (see next page for tips).

Humana offers resources for Medicare members with chronic conditions and their caregivers:

- **Humanapointsofcare.com:** online support and education for Medicare members and caregivers to help improve health and quality of life.
- **Humana Health Planning and Support Line*:** support for Humana Medicare Advantage plan members with certain chronic conditions. Call **1-800-622-9529 (TTY:711)**, Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m., to see if your loved one is eligible.
- **Humana Member Assistance Program*:** help with life's emotional challenges for Humana Medicare Advantage plan members. Call **1-800-767-6171 (TTY: 711)**, Monday - Friday, 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

* Not available with stand-alone prescription drug plans

¹ www.healthinaging.org/aging-and-health-a-to-z/topic:heart-failure/info:lifestyle-and-management/

Share the health. If you enjoy receiving this newsletter, please share it with friends and family members who may benefit as well. For more caregiving resources, go to **Humana.com/caregiver**.

Ways to manage multiple medications

About 40 percent of patients with chronic heart failure have five or more other serious conditions¹, such as diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, obesity and depression. This creates special challenges, such as making sure all medicines are taken at the right times.

You can help your loved one develop a schedule if he or she takes more than one drug. Here are five ideas:

1. Match taking medications with his or her daily activities, such as brushing the teeth, eating meals (keep drugs at the table), walking a pet or drinking the first cup of coffee or tea in the morning.
2. Set up a daily/weekly pill box divided into morning, noon and night if medications are taken several times a day. This reminds him or her if doses are missed.
3. Set up alarms or sign up for daily text reminders. Two options are **MyHumana.com/takemymedicine** and the RightSource® mobile app.
4. Find a pill buddy to remind him or her to take medications – and your loved one can remind the buddy as well.
5. Talk with the doctor about possibly switching drugs to fit his or her daily schedule, using combination products or changing dosage forms (i.e., transdermal patch). Ask if any drugs are no longer needed.

Common medicines for heart failure:

- **ACE/ARB:** Makes it easier for heart to pump, helps heart muscle work better and can lower blood pressure.
- **Beta blockers:** Block the body's response to some substances that can damage the heart and help heart muscle work better; can lower blood pressure and heart rate.
- **Statins:** Block a step in the body's production of cholesterol.
- **Diuretics:** Get rid of excess water in legs, feet and lungs if fluid buildup is a problem

¹ Lang, Mancini, Non-Cardiac comorbidities in Chronic Heart Failure, 2007.

Get the most from doctor's visit

Lower the stress and worry that sometimes are associated with doctor's appointments by making sure your loved one has all the information he or she needs. This preparation is an important step toward becoming partners in healthcare.

- Take all prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins and herbals supplements.
- Write down questions.
- Let the doctor know about new or increasing symptoms. These may be treated with medication and diet adjustments before they become more serious:
 - Weakness/fatigue
 - Shortness of breath
 - Inability to exercise
 - Difficulty lying flat without extra pillows
 - Swelling in legs
 - Abdominal distention and bloating
 - Coughing or wheezing
 - Sudden weight gain
 - Nausea or lack of appetite

Most of these symptoms are caused by excess fluid build-up. In heart failure, the body has difficulty ridding itself of salt and water.

- Be ready to talk about lifestyle changes: Decrease salt intake, increase physical activity, lose weight.
- Fluid restriction: Limit total fluid intake to two quarts (64 ounces or eight cups) per day to help keep the body from retaining fluid.
- Sodium restriction: Limit total daily sodium (salt) intake based on the treatment plan to prevent fluid buildup.



Submit caregiver consent form online

If you receive this newsletter, you're identified as a family or friend of a Humana member through a consent form. Having access to your loved one's health plan information can help you as a caregiver.

Now Humana Medicare members can complete and send their signed Consent for Release of Protected Health Information (PHI) online, so getting details about their benefits is easier for you, their caregiver.

Until recently, completing a paper form was the only way to provide a consent form.

This can now be taken care of on MyHumana, the personal, secure online member account, at **Humana.com**. Ask the person you care for to log in on MyHumana:

1. Go to "Accounts & Settings."
2. Scroll down to "Protected Health Information" and click on the link to start the process.

The form needs to be updated/renewed every two years. With this online form, your loved one will know where the form is and when it needs to be updated.

All current consent forms that were submitted on paper are in the process of being moved so they can be managed online, so there's no need to re-enter information for any previously completed consent forms.

Six tips to avoid caregiver burnout

It's easy to get burned out when you're caring for a loved one. Here are some tips from WebMD.com to lower your stress and recharge:

1. **Take time for yourself every day.** Try yoga before breakfast, slip out for a 20-minute walk, go to the movies or take time for a favorite hobby. Even a short break can help.
2. **Get enough sleep.** Most caregivers who say their own health has gotten worse blame loss of sleep. Relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing, may help you at bedtime. If your loved one sleeps during the day but is awake much of the night, try to take naps.
3. **Join a support group.** Look for support groups related to your loved one's illness, if possible. The local agency on aging may have a listing. Or consider joining an online community.
4. **Let animals assist.** Spending time with a cat or dog can be soothing to people who are sick or confined to home. Pets can lower blood pressure, reduce stress and even make elderly people more alert.
5. **Turn on some music.** Music and art can spark fun shared moments for you and the person you're caring for. Familiar music can bring back memories and may lead to clapping or dancing. Art projects should be simple and safe but not too child-like.
6. **Use timers and reminders.** Buy pill boxes that sound an alarm when it's time for the next dose. Try a smart phone app or an online medicine reminder. Pill organizers are a low-tech option.



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Louisville, KY 40202

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Health and wellness or prevention information

Humana is a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in a Humana plan depends on contract renewal.

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We want to hear from you!

Email us at Family_Friends@humana.com and let us know what topics you would like to see addressed in this newsletter



Humana Hero

Diane Logsdon, caregiver for her parents, was raised to follow the Golden Rule. "Treat others like you hope others would treat you, whether it's family or stranger," she says.

"One of my biggest challenges was – and is – all the decisions that have to be made daily. With both parents needing my help, those could sometimes be overwhelming. My father has Parkinson's disease and Mom has Alzheimer's disease, so the role reversal was rough on everyone. I learned there are no wrong decisions as long as you remember how you would want to be treated.

"I've learned to stay involved, not be afraid to ask questions. Make sure you're known as the advocate and decision maker. If you're managing someone else's finances, keep track of everything.

"Caregiving can be exhausting, overwhelming and frustrating but is always rewarding," Diane says. "I wouldn't change these last several years with my parents."