

# Exercise for patients with Chronic Heart Failure (CHF)

## What is Chronic Heart Failure?

It is a progressive heart disease that affects the ability of the heart muscles pump blood.

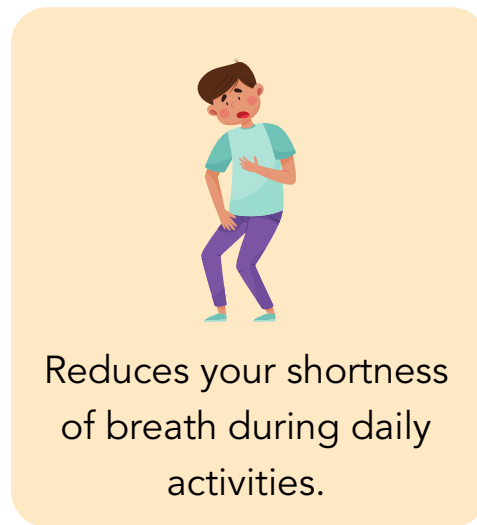
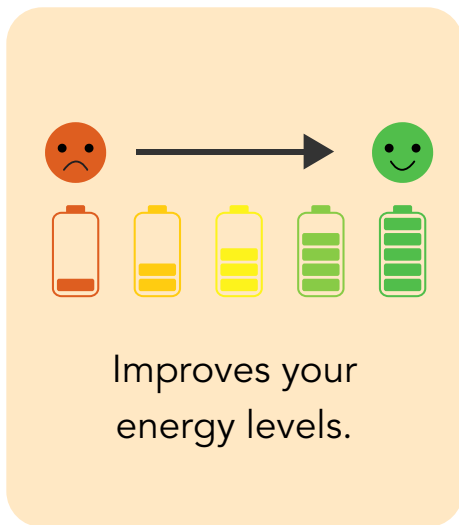
## What happens if I have Chronic Heart Failure?

In a healthy individual, the body relies on the heart to pump oxygen rich blood to the organs. However, in an individual with heart failure, the heart is weakened and is unable to keep up with the body's demands of oxygen rich blood.

This results in fatigue and shortness of breath, and some people experience excessive coughing. Everyday activities such as walking, climbing stairs or carrying groceries can become very difficult.



## Why is exercise important?



Speak to your physiotherapist if you have a specific goal you would like to achieve through the exercise programme.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that you take your medication and meals at least one to two hours before exercise or as instructed by your doctor or physiotherapist.

Keep yourself hydrated before and during exercise but adhere to the fluid restriction limit set.

Try exercising in the evening or in areas where there is more shade. This could reduce your chances of dehydration and exceeding your fluid restriction.

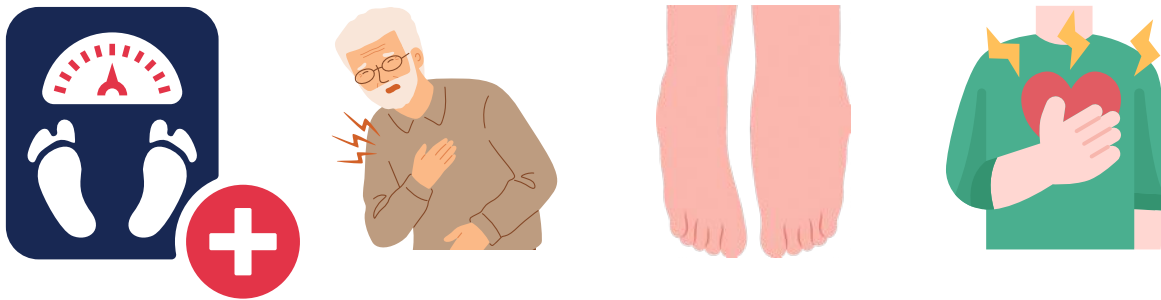


## Advice/precautions

1. Do check your heart rate and blood pressure before exercising. Speak to your therapist or doctor regarding the recommended range you should adhere to before and during exercise.

2. If you develop any of the signs or symptoms below, do not exercise and please seek medical attention immediately.

- Weight gain of more than 1.5kg over 1-2 days.
- Increase/new onset of breathlessness at rest or during activity.
- Increase in swelling of legs and abdomen.
- Increase/new onset of palpitation at rest or during activity.
- New cough with wheezing.

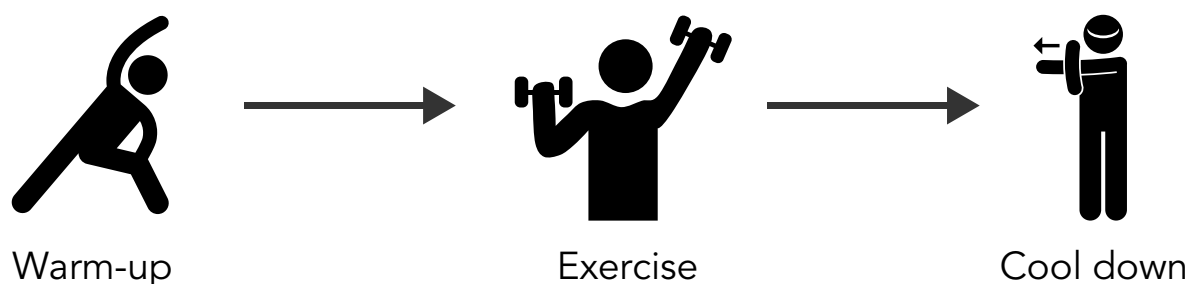


## Self-monitoring during exercise:

If you develop any chest discomfort, pain, dizziness, severe shortness of breath, cold sweat and heart racing or skipping feeling, stop exercising immediately. Use your GTN if you are prescribed one if you develop chest pain. If the symptoms do not go away, please seek medical attention immediately.



## Exercise programme structure:



### STEP ONE: WARM-UP

This is important as it prepares your body for exercises by increasing blood flow, reducing the risk of injuries. Examples of warm up include slow walking and arm swings.

### STEP TWO: EXERCISE

- Frequency: Minimally 3 times a week
- Intensity: RPE level 2 and gradually increase the intensity of exercise as advised by your physiotherapist. Take breaks as required.
- Type: Brisk walking, cycling, strength training
- Time: Your Physiotherapist will advise you on the duration.

### STEP THREE: COOL DOWN

This is crucial as it helps to gradually bring your heart rate and blood pressure down to their normal levels reducing the risk of injuries.

Speak to your physiotherapist for more information on the exercise program prescribed for you.

## Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) Scale

0	Nothing at all	Able to maintain a conversation or sing with no breathlessness or sweating	
0.5	Extremely weak (Just noticeable)		
1	Very weak		
2	Weak(light)		
3	Moderate	Able to maintain a conversation with some breathlessness or sweating	
4			
5	Strong (heavy)	Only able to speak a short sentence	
6			
7	Very strong		
8		Only able to say a few words	
9			
10	Extremely strong (almost maximal)		
	Maximum		

## Practical tips:

It is normal for patients with CHF to have “bad” and “good” days.

### On good days,

#### Do's

- Exercise at the time of the day you feel most energized.

#### Dont's

- Overdo as you might end up feeling too tired.

### On bad days,

#### Do's

- Plan & pace yourself by spreading your activities throughout the day.
- Take regular rest breaks.
- Use the breathing techniques (eg: pursed lip breathing) taught to relieve breathlessness.
- Modify your position (e.g. sitting instead of standing) when performing certain activities to cope better.

#### Dont's

- Avoid physical activity completely.
- Do all your activities one after another.

Contributed by Physiotherapy, Rehabilitation, Allied Health Services

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Information shared is accurate as of April 2024 and subject to revision without prior notice.



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