

# CHF News: Take It To Heart



A monthly newsletter for REACT study patients

Issue #6

## Exercise and Congestive Heart Failure

Sometimes the very thought of exercising can be exhausting for many of us. This is especially true for people with CHF who have symptoms like shortness of breath and fatigue. Although it is important to rest, too much rest leads to loss of muscle strength and poor fitness. This may make you feel even more short of breath or tired when you do exert yourself. Research has shown that exercise is safe for CHF patients. In fact, it makes patients feel much better. For this reason, you should consider exercise as an important part of managing your condition.

This article will provide you with suggestions for starting an exercise program. **The type of program that is right for you depends on your condition and how you feel.** That's why it's important to discuss your exercise plans with your doctor, before you begin.

### What are the benefits of exercise?

Regular exercise can help you feel better, look better and work better. People with CHF have found that by exercising on a regular basis they are:

- less short of breath
- less tired
- more energetic in doing their routine, day to day activities

- happier and better able to cope with stress

### Getting Started:

#### Visit your doctor:

Before starting an exercise program, it is important to get your doctor's opinion. Based on your individual needs, your doctor can suggest some activities that are good for you, and the amount of exercise you should start with. This will help you set realistic goals.

#### Pick an activity you enjoy:

If you choose an activity that you enjoy, it is more likely that you will stick to it and thus enjoy the benefits of regular exercise. Any activity that gets you moving around is better than none at all. The trick is to get started! You may also want to ask a friend or family member to join you. Not only will this make your exercise program more fun; you will be more likely to continue exercising on a regular basis. In addition, someone will be close by if you suddenly feel unwell.

### What are some exercises that you can do?

#### I. Walking

Walking is one of the best activities for people with CHF. It does not require any special skills, it is inexpensive, and can be done almost anywhere and anytime.

All you need is a good pair of shoes! The amount of walking you do, will depend on your condition. For some, this may involve simply walking around the kitchen table several times a day. Others may be able to try the walking program below, as suggested by The Heart and Stroke Foundation. Remember to check with your doctor first to see if this is right for you.

Week 1-2	Walk 5 to 10 minutes
Week 3-4	Walk 10 to 15 minutes
Week 5-6	Walk 15 to 20 minutes
Week 7-8	Walk 20 to 30 minutes

- Aim to walk three times per week.
- Pace yourself so that you can walk and talk to your exercise partner.
- After you finish walking, you should be back to your pre-walking, or resting state, within 10 to 15 minutes. If not, the next time you exercise, cut the distance in half.
- Choose your walking route carefully – avoid hills, steps and rough ground.
- Avoid exercising outdoors if it is hot and humid, or cold and windy, as this may increase your symptoms of CHF. Instead, walk inside. Many shopping malls have "Mall Walking Clubs" – it is not only a good way to stay with your exercise program; it is a

great way to meet new friends.

- Do not walk if you feel ill or unusually tired.
- Work at your own pace and listen to your body. If the suggested walking schedule leaves you feeling tired, work your way up to walking 20 to 30 minutes more slowly. Remember that these are only suggestions.

## 2. Stretching

Stretching exercises can be done while sitting down. Some examples are given below:<sup>1</sup>

**Side-to side looks:** Look straight ahead, turn your head slowly to one side, hold for 10 seconds, then return to centre. Repeat 3 times on each side.

**Shoulder shrugs:** Sitting in a chair, slowly lift your shoulders up to your ears by squeezing your shoulder blades together, pause, then lower. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

**Shoulder circles:** Extend both arms sideways at shoulder height. Rotate arms 10 times in small forward circles. Repeat circling back.

## 3. Weight training

Weight training has been shown to be helpful to people with CHF. Using a light weight to exercise the large muscles in the body, such as the arms and legs, can make the muscles bigger and stronger. If



your muscles are stronger, it is easier for you to do things like bathing, getting up from a chair, and other routine activities. You must see your doctor,

physiotherapist or exercise specialist for instructions on how to do these exercises correctly.

## Activities to avoid

Exercise does not have to be hard to be good for you. In fact, the following strenuous activities are not recommended for most people with CHF because they make the heart work harder than it should:

- heavy lifting
- snow shoveling
- competitive or contact sports
- activities that demand sudden bursts of energy like baseball, racquetball, tennis and hockey
- heavy housework like scrubbing floors, vacuuming, or other cleaning that makes you tired

## How much should you exercise?

Exercise as much as you can, without getting tired, short of breath, or making your heart beat too fast. When you are feeling well, you should try to exercise at least three times per week. **The length of time you exercise will again depend on your condition.** Start by exercising for a short period of time, and at a low level, and then slowly increase the time you spend exercising. You do not have to do all your exercise at one time. It all depends on how you feel. For example, you can exercise 4 times a day, for 5 minutes each time, rather than for 20 minutes just once a day. If you do too much, you may find that you are quite tired the next day. If this happens you will need to adjust your exercise program.

## When is the best time to exercise?

Plan to exercise when you feel most energetic. This may be in the morning or after an afternoon nap. It is best not to exercise right after eating a meal. Your heart needs to work at digesting your food. Instead have a nap or sit down and

read the newspaper. When you begin your exercise program, try not to do a lot of other physical activities (housework, yard work) on the same day that you exercise.

## When should you not exercise?

Avoid exercising if you feel unusually tired, or if you feel unwell due to the flu, cold or other illness. Once you feel better, you can start exercising again. If you are exercising and have any of the following symptoms, STOP immediately:

- chest pain or discomfort
- shortness of breath
- weakness or dizziness
- any discomfort at all
- a fast heart rate

## Rest periods

When planning your new exercise program, do not forget to build rest periods into your daily schedule. Rest periods allow your heart to "recharge" and store up new energy. Rest is especially important after a meal or physical activity. Take the time to have a nap, read, listen to music or watch TV. Alternate heavy and light tasks during the day. Remember that both exercise and rest periods are important in managing your CHF – it is a matter of balancing the two.

As you can see, there are many good reasons to exercise if you have CHF. You don't need to join a health club to do it, and exercise does not have to be hard to be good for you. When done on a regular basis, you can enjoy the many benefits of exercise. Before starting an exercise program, be sure to talk to your doctor.

# HEARTFELT PROFILES



Ten years ago, at the age of 53, I was diagnosed with CHF. I was so ill and weak that it took a month in the hospital before my condition was brought under control. The news of my illness was devastating. As a housewife and a mother of four children, I had responsibilities. My husband had just retired and instead of starting out with our best foot forward, we had many serious adjustments to make. I was wrought with guilt so that my mental state wasn't much better than my physical condition. My husband became my caregiver at home and during that first month, he took care of everything except my personal hygiene. It was a lot to ask of him but he never complained. When I became stronger, I was able to resume most of my chores except washing floors and vacuuming. A lot has changed in our life. We don't go out where people smoke. Any smokers visiting our house, smoke outside. I am on five heart medications and seldom miss a dose. To me, it is my lifeline. I try to stay "heart smart" in our cooking but there are times we both cheat. My exercise is limited but I try to do my best. I weigh myself regularly and I don't often exceed the recommended fluid intake.

Three years ago, my husband had a heart attack and quadruple surgery. We've been through a lot together and learned together. If I were to give advice to other CHF patients I would tell them to be adamant about taking all their medication on time. Never quit any medication unless your doctor tells you to. Keep a positive mental attitude. That's half the battle. The other half is the faith you put in your doctor. Be thankful for the understanding of family and friends. The rest is up to you. We have only two guarantees in life: death and taxes. Grin and bear it!



**Caution:  
SALT  
AHEAD!**

By Pamela Monkhouse  
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In a few months, summer will be here and with it, the barbecuing season. Barbecued food tastes great and it is a healthy way to cook. What's the catch? Those condiments that you might use can really add salt to the meal. For example, a hamburger with a bun and salad contains only 300 mg of sodium. Put BBQ sauce, ketchup, mustard and relish on your burger and Italian dressing on your salad and you have added an extra 600 mg of sodium for a total of 900 mg, almost half the daily recommendation. It is better to use fresh tomatoes, lettuce and onions on your burger and add oil and vinegar to your salad for flavouring. If you choose to use condiments, do so with restraint. Here is the sodium content of some favourites.

Ketchup (1 tbsp)	180 mg
Mustard (1 tsp)	126 mg
Italian dressing (1 tbsp)	116 mg
Soya sauce (1 tsp)	340 mg
Garlic salt (1 tsp)	1,620 mg
Sweet relish (1 tbsp)	122 mg



## HEARTWISE ADVICE

### Ask for directions!

Sometimes medications have unwanted effects. Before starting a new medication, ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse about possible side effects and what to do to avoid or treat them. If you think you are experiencing a side effect, call your doctor or pharmacist. Do not stop taking your medication without the advice of your doctor.

# COOK TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT



## Low Sodium Tomato Ketchup

2 cups	tomatoes, canned (no added salt) or peeled, fresh tomatoes	500 mL
1/3 cup	onion, chopped	75 mL
2 tbsp	white sugar	25 mL
1/4 cup	vinegar	50 mL
dash	ground cloves	dash
dash	ginger	dash
dash	cinnamon	dash
dash	allspice	dash
pinch	chili powder	pinch
	red food colouring (optional)	
1 1/4 tsp	cornstarch	6 mL

Simmer tomato and onion until soft. Process 1 to 2 minutes in blender. Add the remaining ingredients and simmer approximately 1 1/4 hours until reduced to half of the original volume. Add cornstarch to 1/4 cup (50 mL) of mixture and return to pot. Stir constantly until sauce is thickened. Store in refrigerator in sealable container. Keeps several months. Makes 1 1/4 cups (300 mL).

## Oktoberfest Mustard

2	egg yolks	2
1/2 cup	white sugar	125 mL
2 tbsp	dry mustard	25 mL
1/3 cup	white vinegar	75 mL

Combine all ingredients and mix well. Bring to a boil. Add more dry mustard to reach a desired taste. Serve hot or cold. Store in the refrigerator. Keeps several months. Makes 3/4 cup (175 mL).

### \*Variation:

Prepare your own low sodium mustard by mixing dry mustard powder, water and vinegar.

## LOW SODIUM TOMATO KETCHUP

Per 1 tbsp (15 mL)	
calories	13
protein	trace
fat	trace
carbohydrate	3 g
sodium	2 mg
potassium	54 mg
phosphorus	6 mg

## OKTOBERFEST MUSTARD

Per 1 tbsp (15 mL)	
calories	36
protein	trace
fat	trace
carbohydrate	6.5 g
sodium	trace
potassium	8 mg
phosphorus	16 mg



CHF can be managed, especially if you, the patient, take an active role. Give some special attention to yourself, and **DO REACT** to your body's needs:

- D**o weigh yourself each day
- O**bserve and record any signs and symptoms of CHF
- R**est
- E**xercise
- A**void salty foods and limit fluids in your diet
- C**ontact your doctor if you feel unwell
- T**ake your medication regularly

## Thank you for participating in the REACT Study

Issue #6 of CHF News: Take It To Heart concludes the REACT Study newsletter series. At this time, we would like to thank you for being a part of this study. We hope that your involvement has helped you and your family to learn more about your condition. The information that your medical team gathers from this study may also help others who have CHF. Thanks again!

From "Low Sodium Savvy" by L. Kerr, M. Kennedy, Clinical Dietitians, Nephrology and Renal Transplant Program, University of Alberta Hospital

If you would like to purchase a copy of this cookbook, please contact: Cara Stark – Phone 780-407-1565, Fax 780-407-6015, Address 5B1.07 Walter Mackenzie Centre, 8440-112 street Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2B7. Cost: \$9.95 (includes GST and shipping)