



NUTRITION FOR
PEOPLE LIVING WITH

CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE



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WHAT IS CHF?

Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) occurs when the heart becomes weak or stiff, and can't pump as much blood to the body as it normally would. CHF symptoms such as trouble breathing, fatigue, and nausea, can affect everyday activities, while more serious concerns such as weight changes due to fluid retention, fainting, severe weakness, or chest pain may need immediate medical attention.

CHF is one of the seven primary diagnoses that Open Arms serves. This guide will provide an overview of the general nutrition and food recommendations for those living with CHF.

Nutrition needs for CHF can be highly variable and individualized. Talk to your Registered Dietitian or other healthcare provider to learn what foods are best for you and your symptoms.

NUTRITION FOR CHF

LIMIT SODIUM

Limit sodium intake to 2300 mg (~1 teaspoon of table salt) or less per day. This is key in managing CHF as too much sodium can cause high blood pressure. To limit or decrease your sodium intake, you can:

- Limit adding salt to recipes or at the table
- Eat more fresh foods
- Choose low-sodium food options such as:
 - Fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats
 - Food items with less than 140 milligrams of sodium per serving
 - Food items that say “low sodium” or “sodium-free”
- Flavor foods using fresh or dried foods, spices, or herbs or salt-free seasoning blends (e.g., garlic, onion powder, lemon juice, rosemary, Dash Salt-Free seasoning blends)

KNOW YOUR FATS

Replace saturated and trans fats with unsaturated fats.

Unsaturated fats are essential in the diet and promote good health.

- Unsaturated fats are liquids at room temperature and are found in nuts, seeds, fish, olive oil, and avocados.

Saturated and trans fats increase levels of unhealthy cholesterol.

- Saturated fats are solids at room temperature and are found in animal-based protein.
- Trans fats can be natural or artificial. Natural trans fats are found in some dairy and meat products. Artificial trans fats are liquid oils processed into solid fats. Artificial trans fats are found in foods such as stick margarine, shortening, processed sweets, and baked goods.



FOCUS ON FIBER

Soluble fiber found in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds help remove cholesterol from the body. This process helps to avoid buildup of cholesterol in the blood vessels, which reduces the risk of blood clots.



LIMIT CAFFEINE AND ALCOHOL

Caffeine and alcohol affect fluid levels in the body. Having too much alcohol and caffeine can cause dehydration. Also, drinking too much alcohol over a long-time period can increase your body's fluid levels, leading to high blood pressure. Try plain water, sparkling water, unflavored low-fat dairy milk, plant-based milk, and tea instead of caffeinated drinks and alcohol.



BE MINDFUL OF YOUR FLUID INTAKE

Due to your body's decreased ability to remove fluid from the body, your doctor may ask you to restrict your fluids. To help curb thirst while controlling your fluid intake, you can:

- Drink from smaller cups and glasses
- Eat crushed ice or suck on an ice cube
- Suck on sugar-free lemon drops or hard candy
- Chew sugar-free gum
- Rinse your mouth with mouthwash or water (don't swallow)
- Fully freeze a cold drink and sip the liquid as it melts
- Eat cold or frozen fruit like grapes, mandarin oranges, grapefruit, or berries

RECOMMENDED FOOD LIST

Focusing on the foods you can eat will help you maintain your health and quality of life. The table below follows basic eating guidelines that are known to help manage CHF.

	FOCUS ON	LIMIT
FRUITS & VEGETABLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruit and vegetables • Canned, packaged, or frozen fruits and vegetables with reduced or no added salt, sugar, or fat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canned, packaged, or frozen fruits and vegetables with excessive amounts of salt, sugar, or fat added to them • Fried fruits and vegetables
GRAINS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole-wheat pasta • Whole-grain breads • Brown or wild rice • Oats • Other whole-grain cereals including barley, rye, quinoa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refined grains such as white bread, cereals, rice • Table sugar, sweets, beverages with added sugars • Boxed mixes • Ready-to-eat baked goods
PROTEIN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaner cuts of meat or poultry such as chuck roasts, skinless chicken breasts, turkey cutlets, pork loin • Trim or remove skin or fat on meats • Lean roast beef, ham, or low-fat luncheon meats • Fish and seafood • Plant-based proteins such as beans, tofu, nuts/nut butters, seeds, legumes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher fat-cuts of meats such as pork belly/shoulder, chicken thigh, or ribeye steak • Bacon, sausage, or hot dogs • Deli meats • Meats with skin • Fried meats • Legumes, nuts, seeds, or nut butters with added salt
DAIRY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-fat or low-fat dairy products such as 1% or skim milk • Non-fat or low-fat dairy yogurt • Fat-free and low-fat cheeses such as mozzarella, feta, or goat cheese • Fortified plant-based milk such as rice, soy, almond milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole-fat dairy or dairy products such as whole-fat milk or yogurt • Half-and-half/cream • Sour cream • Higher-fat cheeses such as sharp cheddar, cream, or American cheese

A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a variety of fresh vegetables including green onions, yellow and red tomatoes, green and yellow bell peppers, a corn cob, and a bunch of carrots, all arranged on a rustic wooden surface.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS SODIUM?

Sodium is an important micronutrient, meaning that humans need it in fairly small amounts. Table salt has sodium, as do many other foods and food additives. Sodium levels affect fluid levels in the body. Too much fluid around the heart and in the blood vessels can make the heart work harder and can lead to high blood pressure. For these reasons, people with CHF should limit their sodium intake.

HOW CAN I LOWER MY CHOLESTEROL AND TRIGLYCERIDES?

Cholesterol and triglycerides are types of fat that your body needs to function properly. However, too much of these fats can be harmful to your health. Cholesterol deposits can clog and damage blood vessels. To lower your cholesterol levels, eat more soluble fiber and choose healthier fats. Consuming fiber and healthier fats can also lower triglycerides, in addition to minimizing alcohol and sugar intake and implementing physical activity.

CAN I STILL EXERCISE IF I HAVE CHF?

Exercise can be helpful at any life stage. People with CHF should talk to their doctor to find the right types of exercise for them.

OPEN ARMS IS HERE TO HELP

YOUR OPEN ARMS MENU

Open Arms has a Heart Healthy menu. This diet is low in salt and saturated fats and known to support good health for a range of needs, including individuals living with CHF.

This menu is the best option for those with concerns regarding their heart health. It's appropriate for clients with cardiovascular disease, congestive heart failure (CHF), hypertension (high blood pressure), or hyperlipidemia (high cholesterol or triglycerides). Anyone interested in an overall healthy meal pattern will benefit from this option, as it is focused on nutrient-dense, high fiber foods.

GET IN TOUCH WITH OPEN ARMS

Open Arms has a team of Registered Dietitians that provide free-of-cost nutrition education and counseling to Open Arms clients over the phone. If you have a question about your meals or want to schedule a one-on-one call, contact the Open Arms nutrition team!

Our Registered Dietitians can help:

- Recommend a menu based on your needs and preferences
- Answer your questions about food, nutrition, and health
- Provide nutrition coaching to support you in reaching your health goals
- Suggest additional food resources if you need them
- Give you meal and snack ideas according to your likes, dislikes, and medical needs
- Provide nutrition information about Open Arms meals, such as calorie, nutrient, and allergen information



612-540-7760 Ask to speak with a registered dietitian



nutrition@openarmsmn.org

COMMUNITY RESOURCE CONNECTIONS

CHF

American Heart Association Tools and Resources

- **Support Network online community**
 - Website: <https://supportnetwork.heart.org/>
- **My HF Guide: Our free interactive workbook**
 - Website: <https://mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?i=753422>
- **How Can I Live with Heart Failure? (PDF)**
 - English: <https://www.heart.org/-/media/Files/Health-Topics/Answers-by-Heart/How-Can-I-Live-With-Heart-Failure.pdf>
 - Spanish: https://www.heart.org/-/media/Files/Health-Topics/Answers-by-Heart/Answers-by-Heart-SPANISH/How-Can-Live-HeartFailure_Span.pdf
- **Partnering in Your Treatment: Questions to Ask Your Doctor (PDF)**
 - English: https://www.heart.org/-/media/Files/Health-Topics/Heart-Failure/Heart-Failure-Partnering-in-Your-Treatment.pdf?sc_lang=en
 - Spanish: https://www.heart.org/-/media/Files/Health-Topics/Heart-Failure/Partnering-in-Your-Treatment-Spanish.pdf?sc_lang=en
- **Medication Tracker (PDF)**
 - Website: https://www.heart.org/-/media/Files/Health-Topics/Heart-Failure/HF-Medication-Chart.pdf?sc_lang=en
- **Find Help: Search and Connect to Social Resources**
 - Website: <https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/findhelp>

General Support

- **HeartBrothers Foundation**
 - Website: <https://www.heartbrothers.org>
- **Patient Advocate Foundation**
 - Website: <https://www.patientadvocate.org/>
- **MendedHearts**
 - Website: <https://mendedhearts.org/>
- **Minnesota Department of Health Heart Health Video Series**
 - Website: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/cardiovascular/tools/materials.html>

Caregiver Resources

- **Together in HF**
 - Website: <https://www.togetherinhf.com/>
- **Help for Heart Failure Caregivers**
 - Website: <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/heart-failure/living-with-heart-failure-and-managing-advanced-hf/help-for-heart-failure-caregivers>