Sodium and Heart Failure

Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) occurs when the heart does not pump blood as well as it should, and it backs up in the veins. This can lead to shortness of breath, a buildup of fluid around the heart, lungs, or legs, and fatigue.

Lifestyle Changes May Help Manage CHF

1. **Limit sodium intake**. A high sodium diet may cause the body to retain water. The heart will work harder to pump out the extra water. This may raise blood pressure.
   - Salt is the main source of sodium in food. Use healthy seasoning alternatives, such as black pepper, garlic powder, dried herb blends, lemon or lime juice, and fresh herbs or spices.
   - Choose unseasoned fresh or frozen meats and vegetables.
   - Find low sodium versions of canned, shelf-stable, and frozen foods. The labels "salt-free," "sodium-free," "very-low-sodium," and "low-sodium" all mean a product is lower in sodium.
   - 75% of the sodium intake comes from processed foods and restaurants. Try to eat out less often. Ask restaurants to prepare food without salt.

2. **Read the nutrition label.** The salt content of foods is listed as "sodium" in milligrams (mg). Eat foods that have less than 140 milligrams sodium per serving. Check serving size on packaged food items so that you are aware of how much sodium you are eating based on a serving. Avoid foods that have more than 300 milligrams sodium per serving. Remember, that if you eat more than one serving, you will get more sodium than what is on the label.

3. **Limit fluid intake if recommended by your doctor.** Sometimes your body will retain extra fluid if you drink too much. Record daily weights and contact a member of your CHF care team if weight gain is greater than 3 pounds in one day or greater than 5 pounds in one week.

4. **Physical activity may improve your health.** Exercise can help your heart stay strong. Start slowly and talk to your doctor about how much activity is right for you. Avoid overworking your heart with activities that cause dizziness, shortness of breath, or chest discomfort.

5. **Alcohol:** Avoid alcohol because it may worsen CHF.