

Heart Failure: How to Limit Your Fluids



Sodium causes your body to hold extra fluid, making it harder for your heart to pump. Your doctor may prescribe a medicine to help get rid of excess fluid. This type of medicine is called a diuretic, or water pill. You may also need to limit liquids to help your body get rid of extra water and sodium.

Limiting fluids can help you feel better and lower your risk of having to go to the hospital.

Measuring your fluid intake

Your doctor will tell you how much fluid you should have each day. Usually, it will range from 4 to 8 cups a day, which is about 1 to 2 liters.

To help you with these amounts, here are some common household measures:

This amount of fluid:	is the same as:	and the same as:
1 tablespoon	½ fluid ounce (fl oz)	15 milliliters (mL)
½ cup	4 fl oz	About 120 mL
1 cup	8 fl oz	About 250 mL
4 cups (1 quart)	32 fl oz	About 1,000 mL, or 1 liter

So if you are allowed 8 cups of fluid a day, that is the same as 2,000 mL or 2 liters.

It is important to know how much fluid your regular glasses hold. You can find out by filling a glass with water and then pouring it into a measuring cup. Once you know this, you will not have to measure every time.

Some foods contain a lot of fluid. Any food that will melt, that has a high water content, or that contains a lot of liquid should be measured and counted as part of your fluid intake. So that means you need to count ice cream, gelatin, ice, juicy fruits, and soup.

Tracking your fluid intake

One way to keep track of how much fluid you take in is to have an empty container that holds the amount of fluid you are allowed for the day.

- For example, if you are allowed 64 fl oz a day, you could keep a 2-liter pop bottle at hand. As you drink fluids, put an equal amount of water into the bottle until you reach your fluid limit. When the bottle is full, you have reached your fluid limit and should stop drinking.

Another way to track your fluid intake is to allow yourself 1 cup (8 fl oz) of fluid at each meal (3 meals x 8 oz = 24 fl oz). You can then fill a pitcher with water equal to the rest of your fluid allowance.

- For example, if you are allowed 48 fl oz (6 cups) of fluid a day, you could have 24 fl oz at mealtimes and then another 24 fl oz (3 cups) to drink at other times during the day. If you drink other beverages besides water, then you would need to pour out an equal amount of water from your container.

Common questions about limiting fluids

Does everyone with heart failure need to limit fluids?

No. Usually, just limiting sodium is enough to help your body get rid of extra fluids. Most people do not need to limit their fluids until heart failure is advanced or severe.

Why is limiting fluids important?

Too much fluid in your body can make it harder for your already-weakened heart to pump. This can make symptoms, such as swelling and shortness of breath, worse.

What can I do if I feel thirsty?

It is very important to limit your fluid to the level your doctor suggests. But that can be hard. If you feel thirsty, try chewing gum or sucking on a piece of hard candy, a breath mint, or pieces of frozen fruit like grapes or strawberries. If your lips feel dry, try lip balm. But stick with your program.

Can I have alcohol?

Alcohol can raise your blood pressure which makes your heart work harder, so it is not a good idea when you have heart failure. Since you are allowed only a limited amount of fluid each day, it is best to choose healthier fluids. Check with your doctor to see if you should avoid drinking alcohol.

Questions to ask your doctor

Use the space below to list your questions or concerns. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about limiting fluids for heart failure: