BEATING THE HEART FAILURE BLUES

by Brett Becker, MercyOne Pharmacy Resident

Are you afraid your heart failure is getting worse? Are you frustrated because you can’t do things like you used to? Are you having a really hard time coping with your symptoms? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you are not alone. These worries are shared by many living with heart failure. The important thing is to recognize these emotions and work to better manage them.

STRESS AND ANXIETY

Stress is your body's reaction to the demands of the world. It is the opposite feeling of relaxation and often leads to anxiety. Anxiety is the feeling of uncertainty and fear. An important aspect of managing these feelings involves recognizing your triggers. Whether it’s a bill coming due, a work overload, or the neighbor’s barking dog – knowing your triggers can help you better avoid or manage them. By listing some of the top issues you’re facing right now, you may notice that some of your stressors are events that happen to you, while others seem to originate from within.

Strategies to manage external stressors include lifestyle factors such as eating a healthy diet, being physically active, and getting enough sleep. These will all help to boost your resiliency. It’s also important to try to get back to a state of relaxation when you feel stressed by doing something you enjoy. Often an activity that is calm and quiet will help. Here is a list of activities commonly used to relax:

• Listening to music
• Making art, doing a puzzle, or reading a book
• Sharing time with children or grandchildren
• Taking a warm bath
• Sitting outside or going for a walk
• Petting your cat or dog

The possibilities are almost endless! Be sure you enjoy your activity of choice for at least 10-15 minutes each day, but the more time you have the better. Being able to devote 2-3 hours of “me time” to your favorite activities is great if you can do it!

If you think you might be depressed, start by thinking about the positive things you have done recently. Another good idea is to set small goals to achieve or take part in something each day. This will give you something to look forward to, giving you a sense of accomplishment. If these don’t help, often the best thing you can do is talk to a friend, loved one, or healthcare provider. Talking to someone can help put your feelings into perspective, and they may be able to suggest things to help you feel better. Remember, depression is treatable and there are resources available. You just have to reach out.
DRIVING WITH A HEART CONDITION
by Karena Sauser, ARNP

Driving is a privilege, not a right. With it comes a sense of freedom, independence, security, and accessibility – all posing as positive contributions to a person’s quality of life. Driving makes it easy for a person to attend family and social gatherings, appointments, church and shopping to name a few. However, responsibility and accountability are also expected behaviors of a driver. To lose the privilege of driving can have a major negative impact on a person’s quality of life. A person must find and arrange for other forms of transportation, often relying on other people and having to work around their schedules. This can also make one feel like a burden or that they are imposing on the plans of others. When a person loses their license due to medical issues, it is a difficult decision best made together by the patient, family, and healthcare professionals. Certain situations are also regulated by the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Persons with certain heart conditions have symptoms of lightheadedness or passing out due to low blood pressure, heart arrhythmias, or poorly functioning heart as pump. Low blood pressure can be caused by fast or slow heart rates, medications’ side effects, or heart failure. On most occasions, medications can be adjusted to help with these situations. Lightheadedness can be caused by medications and you should notify your healthcare provider if you are experiencing this. If this symptom occurs after a medication change, it should be mild and improve after a few days. You should never feel like you are going to fall or pass out from a medication. Heart arrhythmias that can cause lightheadedness can be atrial fibrillation, tachycardia (fast heart rate), bradycardia (low heart rate), heart blocks, abnormal ventricular arrhythmias, and cardiac arrest. Again, most of these situations can be corrected by medication but some do warrant a heart device, such as a pacemaker, or internal cardiac defibrillator.

Several organizations such as the American Medical Association, US Department of Transportation, and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration publish a guide for healthcare providers to help decide when persons should no longer be allowed to drive. A person should not drive if they are experiencing chest pain, weakness, fatigue, lightheadedness, or shortness of breath. If these symptoms go away with medication or a surgical procedure, the patient may drive when they are recovered and deemed safe by their healthcare provider. Recovery time usually takes anywhere from 1-12 weeks depending on the treatment or surgery and will be determined by your provider.

If a person has passed out from a cardiac arrest or a ventricular arrhythmia problem and is being treated with medication or has an internal cardiac defibrillator (ICD), they may drive after six months if there is no repeated episode. If they do have a subsequent episode, it is another six months from the most recent episode. If a person has a defibrillator placed without passing out or ventricular arrhythmia, they may drive after recovering from the procedure, usually 1-2 weeks. If a person has a commercial license and has an ICD placed, they are no longer eligible for CDL licensure because of the risk of passing out. There are currently no restrictions on CDL licensure for a pacemaker alone. This can be a big financial issue for those who drive professionally and rely on their licensure for income. However, a person who does not get an ICD when needed for fear of losing licensure puts themselves at risk of passing out, or increases their risk of sudden cardiac death secondary to a cardiac arrhythmia.

Safety on the road for everyone is always the most important thing to consider, which is where responsibility and accountability as a driver come in to play. No one wants to lose the privilege of driving. It can be a hard decision, but it is important to make the right decision. If you have concerns about your heart condition and driving, please talk with your healthcare provider.

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GARBANZO BEAN SOUP

**Ingredients:**

- ½ cup onion
- 3 garlic cloves or ½ tsp. garlic powder
- 2 tsp. oil (canola or vegetable)
- 1 can (14.5 oz.) low sodium vegetable or chicken broth
- 1 can (14.5 oz.) diced tomatoes
- 2 ½ cups water
- 1 can (15.5 oz) low sodium garbanzo beans (drained and rinsed)
- ¾ cup sliced carrots
- 1 tsp. Italian seasoning
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 1 cup whole wheat pasta (rotini, shells, etc.)
- 1 small zucchini, sliced (about 1-2 cups sliced)

**Directions:**

1. Wash, peel, and chop onion. Peel and mince garlic cloves.
2. Heat oil in a large saucepan. Add onion and garlic and cook over medium low heat for 5 minutes.
3. Add broth, tomatoes, and water to saucepan. Stir in garbanzo beans, carrots, and seasonings.
4. Cook on medium-high heat for about 5 minutes.
5. Stir in pasta and zucchini. Reduce heat to medium low.
6. Simmer about 10 minutes or until the pasta is tender.
7. Serve immediately or refrigerate.

**Serves 8, serving size 1 ¼ cups**

- Calories: 120
- Saturated Fat: 0 g
- Sodium: 290 mg
- Protein: 5 g
- Total Fat: 2.5 g
- Fiber: 5 g