

Increase your patient's success with self-care for heart failure

Use these questions and tips as a guide for creating a self-care plan with a patient.

Listen to your patient

Find out what your patient believes about living with heart failure.

Sample questions:

- What does the diagnosis of heart failure mean to you?
- What bothers you most about living with heart failure?
- Do you believe that taking medications and taking care of yourself can improve the quality and length of your life?
- How confident are you that you can maintain a program of modifying your diet, getting exercise, and recording your daily weight?
- What interferes with your ability to make changes and stick to them?
- Does the cost of your medications get in the way of taking them regularly?
- Do you have family, friends, or a community organization available if you need help?
- Have you had any bad experiences with medications or treatments that make you reluctant to try new medications or strategies?
- What are your goals? (e.g., “celebrate my 50th wedding anniversary” or “play golf with my friends”)
- Do you think treatment can help you reach your goal?

Connect your recommendations for therapy to the patient's goals and beliefs.

Help your patient set small goals.

Help the patient set realistic self-care goals

- Make the recommended treatment plan clear, concrete, simple, and understandable.
- Focus recommendations on behavior changes such as exercising every day, rather than numerical outcomes such as losing 10 pounds in a month.
- Guide the patient to focus on one or two small, realistic changes that he or she can begin immediately.
- Encourage the patient to create a goal that involves positive action. (e.g., use lemon juice instead of salt for seasoning).
- At the end of the visit, ask each patient to describe the actions he or she will begin immediately and why the actions are important.

Screen senior heart failure patients for depression using a tool such as the Geriatric Depression Scale.*

* The Geriatric Depression Scale can be found on the web at http://www.americangeriatrics.org/education/dep_tool_06.pdf short form