

Five Steps To a Safe Heart Failure Discharge

Promoting safety and best practice.

1. Provide education on the symptoms of heart failure.

- ♥ Highlight to your patient and their support person the symptoms that brought them to the hospital (fatigue, reduced ability to engage in activity, limb or stomach swelling, palpitations, weight change, cough, shortness of breath, inability to sleep when lying flat, or needing to sleep sitting upright).
- ♥ Explain why these symptoms have worsened, and the need to monitor symptoms daily.

2. Provide a written action plan and discuss when to seek help.

- ♥ Give patients the The Living Well With Heart Failure booklet. It includes action plans for 'my emergency plan' and 'things to do every day' (See Heart Foundation resources over page). Discuss action plans with patients and their support person.
- ♥ Emphasise that early medical review when symptoms worsen can help to keep them out of hospital, or reduce the amount of time needed in hospital.
- ♥ Discuss and confirm with the patient and their support person who they would call if their symptoms worsen (GP, community nurse, Triple Zero 000).

3. Promote medicine adherence and ensure that the patient understands their medicine plan.

- ♥ Ensure the patient has an up to date medicine list and is aware of any new medicines or changed doses.
- ♥ Explain that medicines are vital every day to maintain a healthy heart and symptoms. Medicines must not be stopped without consultation with their doctor. Promote the community pharmacist as a supporting resource in medicine management.

4. Organise medical review by a health professional within seven days of discharge.

- ♥ Assist the patient and/or support person to make a follow up appointment with their regular GP or hospital doctor before discharge.
- ♥ Ask the patient to bring all their hospital paperwork and medicines to their follow up appointment.
- ♥ Give the patient and support person the ward number and contact details in case the discharge summary does not reach the GP in time.

5. Emphasise the importance of cardiac rehabilitation, and physical activity and community chronic disease management programs.

- ♥ Promote attendance at an exercise program and explain how physical activity improves heart, mind and overall health and wellbeing.
- ♥ Facilitate a referral to cardiac rehabilitation, or community-based exercise group run by an exercise professional. Search at heartfoundation.org.au/cardiac-services-directory.
- ♥ Chronic disease management programs and heart failure outreach programs improve quality of life and reduce hospital readmission. Ensure patients are enrolled before discharge. Do they require referral for additional psychosocial support or management of other conditions (Health Independence Program (HIP), Hospital Admission Risk Program (HARP))?

Suggested patient education/discussion script:

Check patient understanding

"Can you tell me why you had to come to hospital?"

Explain symptoms

"Your heart is not pumping blood to the rest of your body as well as it should. This has caused fluid to collect in your..... This can make you feel"

Provide an action plan & promote self management

"When your heart is not pumping properly, fluid can build up in your lungs, stomach or legs. If you notice swelling in your stomach or legs, difficulty breathing and/or weight gain of more than 2kg in two days, see your GP to have your heart checked."

"Who will you tell if your symptoms become worse?"

"If you get help when you first notice your symptoms getting worse, the doctors can treat you earlier. This means there's a better chance of staying out of hospital, or reducing the amount of time you need to spend in hospital."

"You can view a series of animated videos that clearly explain heart failure and how to manage your condition. The videos cover what heart failure is, how it makes you feel and gives practical advice around medicine, exercise, mental and emotional health and when to ask for help." (to watch visit hrt.how/heartfailure)

"Exercise is really good for your heart health and your mental health. Exercise can also help to manage your weight and blood sugar levels."

Wherever possible, confirm that the patient and their support person understand the education provided and self-management advice.

"Can you explain to me what symptoms you will look out for every day?" "If your was getting worse, can you tell me what you would do?"

Heart Foundation resources:

- ♥ The Living Well With Heart Failure booklet is available to support your patient education. See our online version (includes action plans that can be printed and completed in hospital): hrt.how/livingwell
- ♥ To access the Living Well with Heart Failure video series please visit: hrt.how/heartfailure
- ♥ To access the heart failure action management plan (Heart failure: more than just your heart) please visit: hrt.how/hf-ap
- ♥ For more information visit the Heart Foundation website: heartfoundation.org.au

