

Managing Fluid and Exercise

For patients with Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension

In Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (PAH), the goal of therapy is to manage the work of the right side of the heart. Exercising and what you eat and drink are just as important as your medication.

Why is exercise important?

Exercise helps you to stay active and maintain a healthy body weight (a weight range that is right for you). Exercise can help strengthen the heart and lower stress. Many patients with PAH tell us they cannot exercise the way they used to, but try to do some type of exercise such as walking.

Walking is a great way to stay healthy and exercise your muscles. Walking around the house is not enough! When you cannot walk outside because of the weather you can try:

- Doing a “mall walk” program
- Visiting your community centre
- Using a treadmill set at a slow pace



When to stop exercising:

- If you have chest pain
- If you are very short of breath
- If you become lightheaded or dizzy

Stop and rest when you need to, but make walking a part of your lifestyle.

Ask us about other exercises you can do if you have limited mobility.

Why is the food you eat important?

Eating healthy helps you to have more energy and nutritious food choices can help your heart. Limiting the amount of salt in your diet helps lower the buildup of swelling in your body. This helps to decrease the stress on the heart. Salt can also make you thirsty and often makes you drink more.

Patients with PAH are recommended to only have 1.5 litres or 6 cups of liquid in a 24-hour period.



Some healthy eating tips

- ✓ **Do not add salt.** Adding salt increases fluid build-up.
- ✓ **Prepare your own food.** Home-cooked food from fresh ingredients is healthier and less salty than packaged food.
- ✓ **Eat fruit** rather than drinking fruit juice.
- ✓ **Choose whole grains** to make you feel full longer.
- ✓ **Avoid fast food.** It's full of salt and sugar and is very low in nutrition.
- ✓ **Eat when you are hungry**, not bored or "by the clock".
- ✓ **Eat small meals** more often, especially if you feel full fast.
- ✓ If you are missing nutrients in your diet, **take multi-vitamins and B complex vitamins** to fill in what may be missing in your diet. Vitamin D and calcium may also be helpful.

Why limiting fluids and salt is important

In PAH, the right heart works hard. The more fluid you take in, the more fluid your heart has to pump. You should only drink 1.5 litres (6 cups) of fluids each day. Water pills make your kidneys work hard to remove fluid. If you drink a lot, you are undoing the work of the water pills.

Lower how much salt you eat by:

- Not adding salt to food while cooking
- Asking for foods without salt, if you can

Avoid these salty foods:

- Pre-packaged foods
- Fast food
- Canned soup
- Cured and deli-style meats
- Soft-drinks

Weigh yourself every day or every other day if you take water pills. Let your PAH nurse know if you suddenly gain weight or if you have swollen feet or ankles.

Have your flu and pneumonia shots

Visit your family doctor to get the flu shot once a year, and the pneumonia shot every 5 years. Your family members should also have the flu shot once a year.

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