

ENABLELVAD

# CHARTING YOUR COURSE

*A Guide for Caregivers of People Living with LVADs*

## PART TWO:

*Taking Care  
of You*



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**“Taking care of you”**  
*means looking after yourself in a healthy way.*

It includes any activity to maintain your physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health.



## PHYSICAL

- Develop habits that keep you physically healthy such as exercising, eating healthy foods, and getting adequate rest and sleep.
  - *What does my body need to feel nourished, well rested, and strong?*
- Make healthy lifestyle choices, such as quitting smoking.
  - *What unhealthy or unhelpful activities do I need to avoid?*
- Remember your own health care needs.



## EMOTIONAL

- Take time out for yourself to relax or engage in hobbies.
  - *What is a healthy distraction or hobby for me when I need to take a break and recharge?*
- Attend to your emotions.
  - *Are there positive, constructive ways I can deal with my emotions?*



## SOCIAL

- Find the right balance of solitude and social interaction.
  - *Who can I turn to for support and comfort? Who should I avoid?*
  - *What responsibilities do I need to quit doing so I can attend to my needs?*



## SPIRITUAL

- Find time to connect spiritually.
  - *What spiritual practices connect me to God or another higher power I believe in?*

**When you take care of yourself, everyone benefits.** .....



# ▶ HEALTHY EATING AND NUTRITION

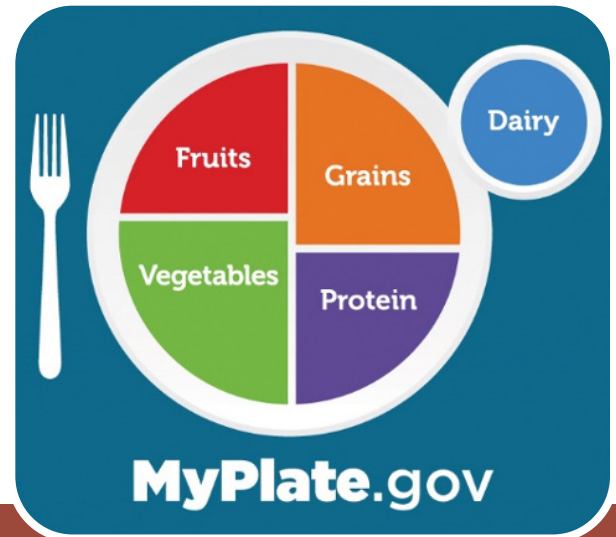
Healthy eating means eating foods that help you feel strong and energetic. The foods you eat can also sharpen your memory and stabilize your mood.

*Healthy eating doesn't have to be impossible.*

You can take small steps to eat healthier for you and the person you care for.

One such example of healthy eating is from **myplate.gov**.

- Focus on eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy or fortified soy alternatives, and protein foods.
- Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Change to low-fat or fat-free dairy.
- Make half your grains whole grains.
- Vary your protein routine.
- Choose foods and beverages with less added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium.



## *Healthy Eating for People with Heart Failure and LVADs*

Many caregivers share their meals with the person they care for, so cooking for heart failure and LVAD diet considerations is important.

▶ People with heart failure should usually avoid high salt or added salt in their food. An example of a low salt diet is the DASH diet.

- The DASH diet encourages you to eat a variety of foods rich in nutrients that help lower blood pressure.
- The DASH diet also focuses on reducing the sodium (Na+) in your diet. The best way to do this is to decrease the amount of salt in your food.

Tips for eating on a low salt diet can be found at: [https://www.cdc.gov/salt/reduce\\_sodium\\_tips.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/salt/reduce_sodium_tips.htm)

▶ People with an LVAD are usually on Warfarin (blood thinning medicine), which means certain foods could affect the function of the medicine. These foods should be avoided or limited.

- Foods with Vitamin K, such as kale, spinach, brussel sprouts, collard greens, broccoli, and asparagus, should be eaten in only small amounts.
- Certain drinks, such as cranberry juice and alcohol, should also be consumed in small amounts.

Tips for eating on Warfarin can be found at: <https://www.nutrition.va.gov/docs/UpdatedPatientEd/WarfarinAndDiet%202016.pdf>.

# PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

## Your Health Care

- Even though you may be busy caring for your loved one, it's important to continue to take care of your own health too.
- Remember to keep up with your own regular medical visits.
- Continue to track and adhere to your own medications.

## Quitting Smoking

- Smoking harms nearly every organ of the body and diminishes overall health.
- Quitting smoking improves the body's ability to heal and respond to medical treatments. The benefits of quitting smoking are great and start instantly.
- Want help quitting? Contact UAB's Tobacco Consult Service at (205) 934-0411.

## Exercise

- Exercise has been shown to improve mood and other symptoms, increase energy levels, and improve sleep.
- To achieve the maximum benefits of exercise, the recommendation is 20 to 30 minutes per session, at least five times per week. However, as little as five minutes of exercise a day may be beneficial.
- Gradually increase your activity level if you have not been exercising regularly.
- Stick with it. If you exercise regularly, it will become part of your lifestyle. Finding someone to exercise with will help you stay motivated.

## Relaxation

- Stress and tension impact your whole body. Take some time each day to relax, rest, and restore.
- Relaxation techniques are useful to help relieve tension, decrease worry, and improve sleep. Your coach will discuss these techniques with you.
- Make time for activities you enjoy, whether it be going on walks, playing games, knitting, or watching your favorite TV show. Taking time for yourself can also reduce stress and anxiety.



# ▶ **ACTIVITY:** *Simple Ways You Can Relax*

In the below table are some techniques to help guide relaxation and meditation. These proven practices can help people focus on themselves and relieve stress. Please try some to see if any feel right for you.

NAME	GOAL	TECHNIQUE
<p><b>Relaxed (Diaphragmatic) Breathing</b></p>	<p><b>Promotes relaxation, improves physical and mental health</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit in a chair or lie down on your back.</li> <li>• While breathing through your nose with mouth closed, gently expand your belly to fill it with air.</li> <li>• Imagine you are filling a small balloon inside your belly with air each time you inhale.</li> <li>• Breathe out through your mouth, empty your belly while pursing your lips like gently blowing on a candle.</li> <li>• If you become dizzy or light-headed, take smaller breaths and slow down.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Muscle Relaxation</b></p>	<p><b>Trains you to be aware of tension in your body and control tight muscles</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get in a comfortable position, calm yourself with relaxed breathing. Take 4 slow, deep breaths.</li> <li>• Relax your body from face to toe, muscle by muscle. (face, jaw, tongue, eyes, forehead, shoulders, neck, arms, hands, fingers, back, chest, abdomen, legs, feet, toes)</li> <li>• For the next minute let your entire body relax.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Imagery / Visualization</b></p>	<p><b>Uses your imagination to create mental pictures. Engages your 5 senses</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get in a comfortable position, calm yourself with relaxed breathing. Take 4 slow deep breaths.</li> <li>• Picture yourself in a quiet, special place that feels peaceful and safe.</li> <li>• Picture yourself in this quiet, special place as vividly as you can, using all of your senses. Look around. Notice what you see, hear, smell. Feel the warm or cool air against your skin.</li> <li>• Allow yourself to relax even more deeply.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meditation</b></p>	<p><b>Decreases your heart rate, slows your breathing, and eases your mind</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find some place private where you won't be disturbed for 10 to 15 minutes.</li> <li>• Sit comfortably in a chair with your feet flat on the ground and your hands resting on your thighs.</li> <li>• Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, loud enough that someone sitting next to you would hear you.</li> <li>• Close your eyes or maintain a soft focus on a spot on the floor 4 feet in front of you.</li> <li>• Take 10-12 slow deep breaths. Feel the weight of your body against the chair and the contact of your feet against the floor.</li> <li>• Let your breathing return to a normal rhythm. Begin scanning your body, just noticing how it feels without thinking about it too much or judging it. Start with your head and move down to your toes.</li> <li>• Begin counting your breathes with every inhalation and exhalation. When you reach '10', start over with '1'.</li> <li>• Your mind will wander and this is normal. When you notice that it has, gently return your focus to counting your breaths.</li> <li>• Maintain meditation only as long as it is comfortable, a few minutes per day. With practice, extend your time.</li> </ul>

# ▶ GETTING THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

Asking for help can be hard. Many people take pride in their independence. Some people may feel embarrassed, needy, and weak when they ask for help. Yet, asking for help is a vital life skill. It is a sign of strength, not of weakness. Most people do it every day without thinking about it. And many of the obstacles brought on by heart failure can't be tackled alone. Having others help can ease the burden of an LVAD. Plus, loved ones often like to help by making your life easier.

Having a back-up caregiver early on can also be very helpful. Ask someone that you trust and who can learn how to do the caregiving tasks.

## How to ask for help:

- **Step 1:** Tell yourself you need help (this is the hardest step).
- **Step 2:** Figure out exactly what you need help with and when.
- **Step 3:** Look for someone who can help.



## ▶ ACTIVITY: *Identify People Who Can Help*

### Step 1: Who Makes Up Your Support Team

We encourage you to consider the support network that could help you, and the time that it might take them to complete the tasks. The following table helps you to make a list of helpful things that others might do for you currently or in the future.

### Step 2: How Can They Help?

<i>Who Currently Helps? Or Who Could Help?</i>	<i>What Do You Need Help With?</i>	<i>When Do You Need Help With This Task?</i>	<i>Planned? (Yes/No)</i>
EXAMPLE: George, my neighbor	EXAMPLE: Mow the lawn	EXAMPLE: 1hr/week	EXAMPLE: YES

# ▶ WORK TOWARDS A ROUTINE

Working toward a daily routine that includes positive lifestyle choices can help improve both your physical and emotional health. Small steps can have an influence. Pick one thing at a time that you want to work on and try adding it to your daily routine. This could be:

- Spend 20 minutes outside walking or exercising a few days a week.
- Have 10 minutes of uninterrupted time before bed.
- Spend 30 seconds a day thinking about something you're grateful for.
- Take 10 minutes to mediate a few days a week.
- Work toward making one meal a day healthier.



You can slowly work toward a healthier routine. Pick one healthy habit to focus on in a week and see if it can become part of your regular life. Then focus on another habit during another week.

Take small steps so that changes are manageable with your busy schedule. And do what feels and works best for you.



# ▶ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on any of these topics, talk with your health care team, read the resources, or visit the sites listed below:

- **Heart Failure Society of America's "Module 4 – Self-Care: Following Your Treatment Plan and Dealing with Your Symptoms"**
  - [hfsa.org](http://hfsa.org)  
Telephone: 301-312-8635
- **DASH diet - Mayo Clinic's**
  - [mayoclinic.com/health/dash-diet/H100047](http://mayoclinic.com/health/dash-diet/H100047)
- **American Heart Association- "Getting Healthy"**
  - [heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/Getting-Healthy\\_UCM\\_001078\\_SubHomePage.jsp](http://heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/Getting-Healthy_UCM_001078_SubHomePage.jsp)
- **Healthy Weight – Healthy Eating – Centers for Disease Control (CDC)**
  - [cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy\\_eating/](http://cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/)
- **DASH Plan and Reducing Sodium Intake**
  - <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan>
- **Exercise Guidelines - National Institutes of Health (NIH)**
  - [nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000094.htm](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000094.htm)
- **Smoking Cessation**
  - [smokefree.org](http://smokefree.org)  
Local and state telephone quitlines:  
1-800-QUIT-NOW
- **Stress Management and Your Heart – Cleveland Clinic**
  - [my.clevelandclinic.org/heart/prevention/stress/stressheart.aspx](http://my.clevelandclinic.org/heart/prevention/stress/stressheart.aspx)
- **American Heart Association's "Recognizing Advanced Heart Failure and Knowing Your Options"**
  - [heart.org](http://heart.org)
- **UAB Heart Failure Guide**
  - <https://www.uabmedicine.org/patient-care/conditions/heart-failure>

For more caregiver support resources, including a discussion board to connect with other caregivers and ask questions, visit: <https://patientdecisionaid.org/lvad-caregiver-support/>