

# Achieve

▶ **YOUR HEALTHIEST LIFE WITH HEART FAILURE**

## A New Future Awaits You



Welcome to the AvMed Disease Management Program's new newsletter, *Achieve*. We've designed it specifically for our Members who are living with heart failure, and our goal is simple: to bring you expert-approved strategies that help you not only manage your condition, but also help you achieve your optimal health.

Each quarterly issue will deliver condition-specific articles with plenty of support for the rest of your life, from eating well, to moving more, to reducing stress.

And no matter where you are in your heart failure journey, AvMed's Disease Management team — staffed with registered nurses, care

advocates and a dietitian — can guide you every step of the way. Whether you need help making doctor's appointments, managing your medications or finding local resources, your care team is just a phone call or email away.

To speak with a Case Manager, please call **1-833-609-0735** or email us at **DM@avmed.org**. We are honored to be your partner in health care.

Sincerely,

**Robert Bonnell, M.D.**  
**AvMed Medical Director**

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# 6 Ways Heart Failure Patients Can Avoid Another Hospital Stay

Lower your risk of a return trip with these tips.



**H**ear failure is a lot more common than you probably realize. In fact, more than 6 million Americans have the condition — and roughly 1 million of them are hospitalized each year for related complications, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“The words ‘heart failure’ carry a sense that it’s gloom and doom,” says Tomas Ayala, M.D., a cardiologist with Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore. “That’s not necessarily the case. You have a lot more control over your condition than you realize.”

In fact, our Disease Management Program is designed to help you manage your condition in order to reduce your need for a hospital readmission.

Dr. Ayala emphasizes things like taking your medications, eating well and monitoring your symp-

toms: “They can have a huge impact on whether you stay home or go back to the hospital.”

Here’s how to have some control over your condition and improve your chances of staying home.

## 1 Set Yourself Up for Success

At the end of your hospital stay, you might be focused on getting out as quickly as possible. But don’t rush through those discharge instructions. Think of this time as a chance to set yourself up for success at home. Before you leave the hospital, it would be helpful to:

**Choose an advocate.** Heart failure can leave you exhausted and off your game. You may need someone to drive you to follow-up appointments or to pick up your medications. You may even need help with meals. Rather than coordinating all that care yourself, ask a loved one to act as your advocate and handle the details as much as they can.

**Get it in writing.** Your care team of doctors, nurses and therapists will be sharing information about your condition and your treatment plan. Keep a notebook by your hospital bed to take notes — or ask your advocate to jot things down. Also ask your care team for printed information and save everything in a dedicated folder.

**Sign up for support.** Physical therapy and occupational sessions can help you build endurance and address barriers that affect your emotional and physical needs using everyday activities, exercises and therapies. One study linked higher hospital spending on occupational therapy with lower readmission rates for heart failure patients. The extra appointments can feel like a hassle, but they’re worth the time and effort.

**We’re Here for You**  
Your Case Manager can connect you to the resources you need.  
**Just call 1-833-609-0735.**

## 2 Get Your Meds in Order

“Your medications often change so much after a hospital stay that it’s easy to get confused,” Dr. Ayala says. “It’s easy to make a mistake and go back to the old regimen.”

Taking the right medication is essential for your safety. Dr. Ayala’s tips for managing changes:

**Keep a list of all your medications and how to take them.** Should they be taken with or without food? What time of day?

**Set an alarm on your phone for each dose.** Many smartphones allow you to set multiple alarms so you’re covered.

**Get help with refills.** Many pharmacies will send texts when it’s time for a refill or to pick up your medications.



### **Speak up if cost is an issue.**

“There are assistance programs where patients can get what they need at a reduced cost, but if they don’t tell us there’s a problem, we can’t help,” says Allen Anderson, M.D., chief of cardiology at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. If you’re struggling, be sure to reach out to your Case Manager.



## 3 Stock Your Kitchen (With the Right Foods)

Too much salt can make your body retain fluid, which forces your heart to work too hard. “Any increase in salt, even a bag of chips, can cause problems,” says Dr. Ayala. “Ordinary foods like ketchup, lunch meats and frozen dinners are loaded with salt. Too much of it can make the difference between staying out of the hospital and coming back in.”

Ask your advocate to help you stock up on low- or no-salt foods. That means moving fresh vegetables, fruits and whole grains to the top of the list and clearing the cupboards of salty alternatives.

You can also **consider working with a dietitian, who can help you make healthier choices.**

Please call the Disease Management Department if you feel a discussion with the dietitian would be helpful: **1-833-609-0735**.

## 4 Know Which Symptoms to Monitor

“One of the best ways to prevent readmission is to catch problems before they become so serious that the only solution is hospital-

ization,” says Dr. Ayala. “If you call early enough, we can make an adjustment to your medication that may help you stay home.”

Symptoms you might be asked to track include weight gain, swelling, blood pressure, heart rate and shortness of breath.

## 5 Keep Your Follow-Ups

These appointments are important: Your care team will track your progress and check for subtle changes that may be hard to notice on your own. “We can see if there’s swelling or if a patient seems breathless,” says Dr. Anderson. “Those are helpful (signs) that let us know how you’re doing.”

## 6 Mind Your Mood

It’s normal to feel down after a hospital stay. But don’t assume negative emotions will simply lift. “We can have a patient’s heart failure pretty well tuned up. But they might still feel poorly because of depression,” says Dr. Anderson.

Depression can interfere with your motivation to be active and follow through on tasks that can keep you healthy. If you’re feeling low, don’t hesitate to talk to your doctor or Case Manager right away. They can help you find relief.

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# The Right Care at the Right Time

When you need quick care, these  
AvMed services will be standing by.

## Access Your Account 24/7

Register or log in  
at **AvMed.org**

## Call Member Engagement

**1-800-782-8663**  
(TTY/TDD: 711)

**HOURS:**  
7 days a week,  
from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

### Nurse on call

**1-888-866-5432**

Speak to a registered nurse at any time of day or night about a non-life-threatening illness or injury.

### MDLive virtual visits

**1-800-400-MDLIVE**  
or **MDLive.com/AvMed**

Speak with a licensed doctor virtually or by phone from the comfort of home 24/7/365 for non-emergency symptoms. Prescriptions will be sent to your local pharmacy.

### DispatchHealth

**1-888-489-0212**

Licensed medical professionals come to you ready to treat urgent issues such as cuts and infections. Call 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily to determine if they are available in your area.

### Urgent care center

**AvMed.org**

If you think you have bronchitis, an infection, an allergic reaction or need wound care, visit an urgent care center if your physician is unavailable. To find an in-network center, go to **AvMed.org**.

### Emergency department

If you suspect a heart attack or stroke, or have uncontrollable bleeding or trouble breathing, don't wait: Call 911 or go to the ER.