



Making the Most of the Follow-Up Visit

It's not enough for a patient to keep their follow-up appointment – the appointment must also be a good one. Here are important reminders for a clinician, particularly useful during the discharge process, to maximize the quality of the first and subsequent follow-up visits for a patient with HF and/or AMI.

Step 1: Help your patients come prepared to their appointment

Call your patients at least one day before their appointment to remind them they have a scheduled follow-up visit. Also, remind them to bring to the appointment:

- A written/typed list of all current medications or their pill bottles
- Copies of recent lab results and test results since discharge and/or their last clinic visit
- A list of their current health care clinical team with medical reasons why each is being seen
- If not available via EMR, a document of their health history to include:
 - Any surgical procedures with approximate dates
 - Prior or ongoing illnesses/health issues
 - A list of any medical tests, especially if performed within the last year
 - Relevant family health history

Step 2: Important communication reminders for the first follow-up visit

During a first follow-up visit with a HF and/or AMI patient, try to ask the following questions:

- Tell me about your heart disease (HF or AMI). How have you been doing lately?
- What symptoms bother you the most?
- Help me to understand what is important to you about your healthcare.
- Are you having any difficulty following your treatment plan?
- Are you taking your medicines everyday as directed?
- Are the prescribed medicines causing any side effects that so far?
- It's recommended that you weigh yourself daily. Do you have a scale at home? Are you weighing yourself every day?
- How are you sleeping? Are you having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep?
- Having heart disease can be stressful. How are you doing?
- How are you doing with your diet and exercise plan?
- Do you need help walking, eating, bathing, getting dressed, or with other activities?
- Do you have family, friends, or a community organization available if you need help with daily activities?



Communicate the basic education components for patient self-care:

- Name, purpose, frequency, and side effects of each medication
- The benefits of exercise and examples of activities
- Special diet recommendations and examples of types of food or feed preparation
- The importance of monitoring sodium intake
- Recognizing signs and symptoms of a worsening condition
- How to respond to worsening signs or symptoms
- The importance of monitoring one's weight on a daily basis
- The importance of being in touch with one's emotions
- The importance of health promotion and managing co-morbidities

Remind patients:

- Who to call if symptoms worsen
- Who to call in case of an emergency
- When they are expected back for their next follow-up appointment

Step 3: Encourage patient engagement throughout their care

The first follow-up visit should set the stage for a patient's care at home. The following questions can help ensure your patients are successfully adhering to their prescribed treatment plans between visits.

General Well-being

- How have you been feeling since your last visit?
- Have you experienced any chest pain, shortness of breath swelling, fatigue or tiredness?
- How are you sleeping?
- Have you felt "sad" or "hopeless" much of the time?
- What is your stress level?
- How has your condition affected your daily routine?

Diet and Exercise

- How have changed your diet?
- Are you eating fruits and vegetables?
- How have you limited your salt intake?
- Who is doing the cooking at home?
- What types of foods do you normally eat?
- How often do you eat out?
- How often do you participate in physical activities?
- What types of exercise do you do?



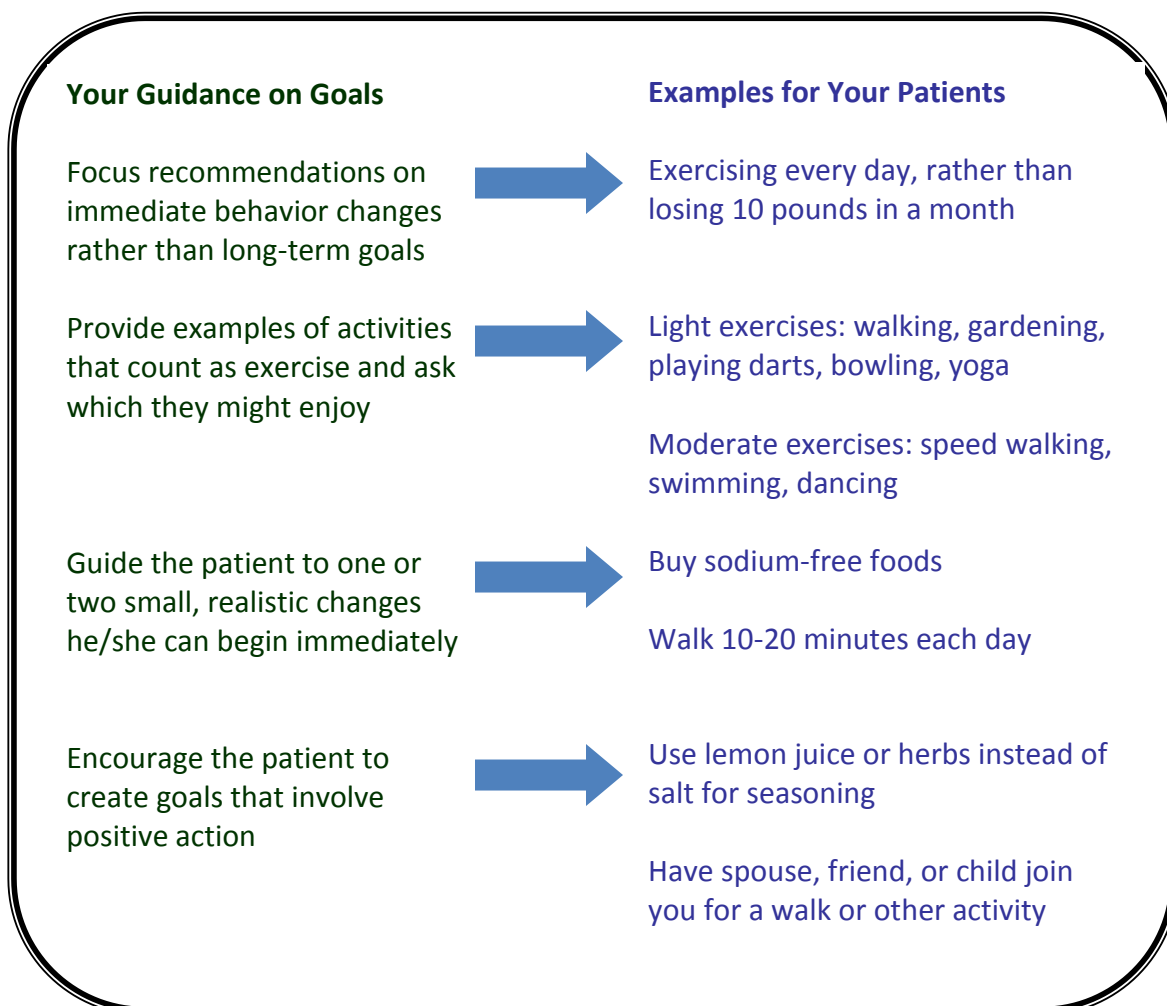
Weight Management

- Are you weighing yourself daily?
- Have you experienced a weight gain of more than 3 pounds?

Medication Management

- Have you been taking your medicines as prescribed?
- Have you experienced any side effects from your medicines?

Step 4: Help your patients set realistic goals





Step 5: Help your patients stay on track with their goals

- Remind patients that treatment can help them reach their stated goals
- Make the recommended treatment plan clear, concrete, simple, and understandable
- During each visit, ask patients to describe the actions they will begin immediately
- Have patients tell you why those actions are important to them
- Update treatment plan as patients introduce lifestyle changes in their daily routine
- Watch for signs of anxiety and depression and adjust treatment accordingly
- Refer patients to cardiac rehabilitation when helpful and appropriate