



What you need to know about Congestive Heart Failure

What is Heart Failure?

Heart Failure, sometimes called “Congestive Heart Failure,” means that a person’s heart is not strong enough to “pump” or push enough blood through the body. The heart has become weak usually because of some kind of heart damage, like a heart attack or uncontrolled high blood pressure. When the heart cannot pump enough blood to the body, fluid will back up in to the lungs making it hard to breathe. People will often feel short of breath and may have swelling in the feet, legs or stomach area. The information below can help you take care of your heart failure.

What Can I Do if I Have Heart Failure?

- See your doctor on a regular basis
- Get a flu shot
- Don’t add salt to your food! This includes seasonings such as garlic salt, onion salt, celery salt. [Try “Mrs. Dash”, garlic powder, onion powder, celery powder, pepper or lemon juice for flavor].
- Follow the diet your doctor tells you to, be extra careful to not eat salty foods such as “pickles, potato chips or Bisquick. Check the labels on canned vegetables and frozen foods, most of these have a lot of salt.
- Ask your doctor if it’s okay to use salt substitute. Be sure to tell the doctor the exact name of the salt substitute you would like to use, some of these are not safe for heart failure patients
- Exercise as your doctor tells you to, and plan your daily activities so you don’t get too tired
- Take your medications as prescribed
- Weigh yourself daily in the morning after using the bathroom and before eating breakfast, and call your doctor right away if your weight starts going up
- Talk to your doctor about the signs of Heart Failure, and when to call the doctor because your condition has changed
- Ask questions about heart failure
- If you smoke, ask your doctor for information on how to help you stop smoking
- Call our Heart Failure Disease Management Program (toll-free) at 1-866-593-2538

Tests and Medications:

Your doctor may order some tests to determine if you have heart failure. The most common test ordered to determine whether or not you have heart failure is:

- **Echocardiogram** - is an ultrasound that can show how well your heart is pumping. It also helps your doctor plan your care.

There are a few types of medications used to treat heart failure. It is common for a person with heart failure to be on more than one medication.

Combinations of the following medications are used to treat heart failure symptoms:

- **Diuretics**: these medications are taken to remove extra fluid in your body
- **Digoxin**: this medication is used to help strengthen the pumping action of your heart
- **Ace-Inhibitor**: this medication will lower your blood pressure
- **Beta-Blockers**: this medication will help lower your blood pressure as well as control your heart rate, and also help make the pumping action of your heart stronger

References: The Cleveland Clinic Foundation HF management. SOC/NYHA Functional Class/ACC/AHA Guidelines endorsed by the Heart Failure Society of America, 2001.

These Clinical Practice Guidelines are only a general guide and are not intended to replace your doctor's judgment. Always talk with your doctor to be sure you are getting the right examinations, treatment, testing and care recommendations.