

Congestive Heart Failure



CARDIAC HEALTH
RESOURCES
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Work closely with your
health care team.

Hearing the words "heart failure" can make you think the heart suddenly stops. But the heart does not suddenly stop. Heart failure occurs when the heart cannot pump out enough blood. Heart failure develops over time and may be a symptom of serious coronary heart disease.

Congestive heart failure (CHF) refers to the buildup of fluid that may occur in some people with heart failure. With CHF, the ventricles of the heart cannot pump out all the blood they receive. This means they cannot receive all the incoming blood. The result is a backup of blood that is then forced into the body and lung tissues. This can lead to shortness of breath or swelling in the legs, feet, or stomach.

WHAT CAUSES HEART FAILURE?

Sometimes, heart failure is the result of heart valve problems or infections in the heart. Heart failure may also happen if you have blocked arteries. The following conditions can lead to heart failure:

- high blood pressure
- uncontrolled diabetes
- high cholesterol
- obesity
- smoking

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A person can lower their risk by changing these factors.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CHF?

The heart will try to adjust for the loss of its pumping ability. It may become bigger, the muscles may get thicker, or it may beat more often. These adjustments can hide the condition, sometimes for years before symptoms begin to appear.

Contact your doctor if you notice any of these symptoms:

- chest pain or tightness
- shortness of breath either at rest or when exercising
- swelling in the feet, legs, or stomach
- long-term cough or coughing up blood
- tiring easily
- sudden weight gain
- needing to sit up or use extra pillows to sleep

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR CHF?

Proper treatment can help you control congestive heart failure and feel better. Follow the advice of your health care team carefully. Medications and lifestyle changes can help. The usual treatment plan includes:

Medicines

You may need more than one medicine. Taking your medicines correctly can help you avoid serious problems. Take the right amount of each medicine at the right times. Report any side effects to your doctor. Talk with your doctor before taking any over-the-counter medicines, even for headaches or colds.

Diet

Your goal will be to reduce salt, and possibly fat, in your foods. Salt causes more fluid to build up. You also need to get to and stay at a healthy weight.

Exercise and Daily Activities

Mild heart failure may not affect what you can do. Serious heart failure can require changes in your work and leisure activities. Talk with your health care team about this. Follow their advice about exercise. Many people with heart failure say they feel better when they get regular exercise.

Lifestyle Changes

You may be able to reduce the symptoms of CHF with changes in your health habits. These include:

- no smoking
- staying at a healthy weight
- avoiding alcohol and illegal drugs
- exercise within your doctor's guidelines
- getting flu shots each year and avoiding colds

Talk with your health care team about other changes that could help you.

Family support

Include family members in your treatment plans. Let them know how they can help you. Some ways are:

- Helping you remember your medicines on time
- Helping you shop for and prepare healthy foods
- Exercising with you

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- Joining a support group with you

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