

CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE

BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Congestive heart failure (CHF) develops when the heart has lost some of its ability to pump blood. The weak pumping causes fluid (congestion) to build up in the lungs and body tissues. The condition is more common in older adults, and affects men more than women.

FREQUENT SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Feeling short of breath with activity or after lying down for a while.
- Feeling tired and weak.
- Coughing or wheezing.
- Sleep problems (e.g., sleep apnea).
- Swollen legs, ankles, and stomach.
- Appetite loss. A weight gain is due to retained water.
- Muscle wasting (loss of muscle mass).
- Swollen or protruding neck veins.
- Less urine, and a need to urinate at night.
- Less mentally alert, or unable to concentrate.

CAUSES

Over time, various disorders cause the muscles, valves, and blood vessels of the heart to become damaged and weak. The heart is not able to pump enough blood, oxygen, and nutrients to other organs in the body that they need in order for them to function properly.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- High blood pressure, coronary artery disease, heart attack, or heart valve disease.
- Aging, males, African Americans, family history of heart failure.
- Cardiomyopathy (enlarged heart).
- Congenital (being born with) heart disease.
- Abnormal rhythm or irregular heartbeat.
- Risk factors for heart disease that can lead to heart failure include: smoking, obesity, high levels of fats in the blood, use of certain drugs, diet high in fat or salt, diabetes, alcohol abuse, and lack of physical activity.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

If you have a condition that can lead to congestive heart failure, get medical care. Follow your treatment plan. Eat a diet high in fiber, and low in fat and salt. Don't abuse alcohol and don't smoke. Exercise regularly.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Symptoms may be relieved with treatment. Long-term outcome depends on each individual patient and the severity of heart failure.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Heart attack, cardiac arrest, severe heart rhythm problems, pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs), side effects of drugs, total heart failure, and death.

DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms and activities. Medical tests may include blood studies and x-rays. Studies may be done of heart activity, function, and size. They help determine if there has been a heart attack and the extent of any heart damage.

The goal of treatment is to improve the heart's pumping function. A treatment plan will be based on your individual needs. It may include drugs, lifestyle changes, and treating underlying conditions. Medical procedures or surgery may be needed to treat an underlying problem. Newer treatments for CHF are being researched.

Hospital care may be needed for severe cases.

Supplemental oxygen may be used to help breathing.

A heart transplant may be an option for patients not responding to other treatments.

Don't smoke. Find a way to quit that works for you.

Wear or carry identification that says you have this condition. Be sure it lists any drugs that you take.

To learn more: American Heart Association, local branch listed in telephone directory, or call (800) 242-8721; website: www.americanheart.org.

MEDICATIONS

Drugs may be prescribed to improve heart function, to slow and regulate the heart rate, remove extra fluid, lower blood pressure, relax blood vessels, suppress the immune system, and to treat any underlying disorder.

ACTIVITY

Exercise daily. A plan will be prescribed for you.

Resume driving and sexual relations as advised.

DIET

Eat a diet that is low in salt and fat. Avoid alcohol.

Go on a weight loss diet if your weight is a problem.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member has symptoms of congestive heart failure.

After diagnosis, any new symptoms occur that cause concern, or other symptoms become worse.