

# HEART FAILURE

## **DEFINITION:**

Heart Failure means that your heart is unable to pump blood efficiently enough to meet the body's needs. There are many different causes of Heart Failure. The most common causes are damage to the heart muscle after a heart attack, viral infection of the heart muscle, disease of the heart valves and high blood pressure. Behaviors such as smoking, drinking too much alcohol, eating foods high in fat and cholesterol and not exercising can also cause the heart to enlarge and weaken.

Heart Failure symptoms may come on slowly from retaining excess fluid, or suddenly if the heart starts beating too fast or too slow to pump blood properly to the rest of the body. When the heart is not pumping properly, the water in your blood can back up into the lungs or collect in other parts of the body, like the legs and abdomen; this is most commonly known as Congestive Heart Failure (CHF).

## **WHAT KIND OF SYMPTOMS DO PEOPLE WITH CHF HAVE?**

- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Leg Swelling
- Fatigue
- Difficulty breathing when laying flat

## **HOW IS CHF DIAGNOSED?**

- Through a physical exam and chest x-ray by your healthcare provider and an echocardiogram (ultrasound of the heart) to find the cause of CHF. The most important test is the echocardiogram, or "echo" which shows the heart valves and the pumping ability of your heart muscle.

## **HOW IS CHF TREATED?**

Medications are given to:

- Help the kidneys to release extra water from the body in the form of urine.
- Expand the blood vessels to reduce the work of the heart.
- Improve the pumping action of the heart.
- Lower blood pressure.

Other helpful steps include: following a low salt diet, following a prescribed level of activity, stopping smoking, and keeping track of your weight.

## **WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE AT HOME AFTER DISCHARGE?**

CHF can, in most cases, be controlled if YOU:

- Take your medications as prescribed.
- Control your salt intake.
- Exercise as advised.
- Weigh yourself daily and report a sudden weight gain of 2 pounds or more in one day or three pounds or more over one week to your doctor.
- Stop smoking.

## **AT HOME INSTRUCTIONS**

### **MEDICATIONS:**

- Be aware of what your medications do, their side effects, your prescribed dosage AND the best schedule to take them.
- Always keep a current list of your medications and carry a copy with you.
- Always take your medication list as well as your medication bottles with you to your doctor visits.

### **DAILY WEIGHT:**

- Weigh yourself on the same scale each morning after using the bathroom and before you eat breakfast. Make sure the scale is on an even surface.
- Keep a record of your weight daily.
- Bring a copy of your daily weight record to your doctor's visits.
- A gain of 2 pounds overnight or more than 3 pounds in a week should be reported to your doctor.

### **DIET:**

- Limiting the amount of salt in your diet is extremely important. Eating too much salt makes your body retain water.
- Don't add salt to your food when you are cooking.
- Always read labels for the sodium content in foods and make sure that you are not exceeding the number of milligrams that your doctor has told you that it is OK to consume each day. If sodium is listed as one of the first three ingredients there is too much sodium!
- It may be easier to eat several small meals per day than three large meals. When eating out ask that your food be cooked without added salt.
- Avoid any alcoholic beverages.

### **SMOKING:**

- DON'T SMOKE

### **EXERCISE:**

- Gradual increase in exercise to improve endurance is recommended.
- Avoid vigorous exercise that puts sudden demands on the heart.
- Plan for rest periods throughout the day and get plenty of sleep each night.

### **CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF:**

- You have a sudden weight change of 2 or more pounds overnight, or if your weight has changed more than 3 pounds in one week.
- You experience change or increase in any of the following:
  - Shortness of breath
  - Swelling
  - Trouble sleeping at night due to breathing
  - Fatigue
  - Frequent dry cough

### **CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:**

- Unrelieved shortness of breath
- Unrelieved chest pain
- Confusing or fainting