

# LEARNING ABOUT CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE

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ACCESS NURSING SERVICES



## What is Congestive Heart Failure ?

**CHF** stands for **Congestive Heart Failure**, a condition in which the pumping action of the heart is weak. CHF is not actually considered a disease; rather it is the result that comes from some kind of damage to the heart muscle.

With congestive heart failure, the heart is trying, but just can't push blood quickly enough throughout the body. As a result the body doesn't get the oxygen and nutrition it needs to function.

Without enough oxygen in their bodies, people with CHF often get tired very easily. Their hearts are failing.

Normal heart has an average rate 72 beats per minute, but in infants the rate may be as high as 120 beat.



### The Heart: An Amazing "Machine"

An adult heart is pear-shaped, about the size of a large fist and weighs less than a pound.

The sound of a heartbeat is actually made by the closing of *valves* inside the heart.

## Left and Right Side Heart Failure

### Left-side Heart Failure

**Left-side** heart failure involves the left chambers known as a "ventricle".

As "fresh" blood tries to enter the left ventricle from the lungs, it tends to get "stalled". The blood backs up, causing fluid to leak into the lungs.

### Right-side Heart Failure

**Right-side** heart failure is usually caused by failure on the left side. As the left side weakens, the right side of the heart tries to take over.

When the right side loses its pumping power, blood backs up into tissues throughout the body. This tends to cause swelling (known as edema), especially in the legs and ankles.

## What Causes Congestive Heart Failure?

- Scar tissue from a heart attack
- Hardening of the arteries
- Untreated high blood pressure
- Diseases of the heart valves (usually from rheumatic fever)
- Birth defects
- Diseases of the heart muscle
- Severe lung disease
- Uncontrolled diabetes
- Toxic exposure to drugs or alcohol
- Old age
- Pregnancy. (In rare cases, CHF can develop shortly before or after a woman gives birth).
- Viral infections
- Severe anemia
- Thyroid disease

### The Most Common Symptoms of CHF

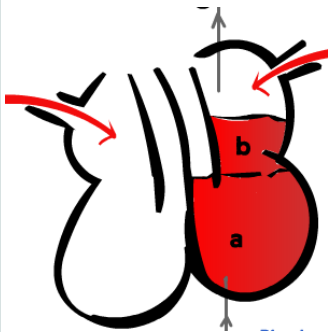
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Coughing
- Trouble Sleeping
- Abdominal Discomfort
- Sudden Weight Gain
- Edema
- Memory Loss & Confusion
- Palpitations

### How Is CHF Treated?

- Medications
- Special diets
- Fluid restrictions
- Exercise-as tolerated
- Lifestyle changes
- Surgery ( heart valve replacement, angioplasty, coronary artery bypass, pacemaker, heart transplant)



### Common CHF Medications



■ **ACE Inhibitors:** By relaxing blood vessels, ACE inhibitors help reduce blood pressure and slow the progression of heart failure-Vasotec, and Lotensin. Dizziness is a common side effect.

■ **Diuretics:** Commonly called “water pills”, diuretics help get rid of excess fluid and sodium in the body. Lasix, Diuril and Dyazide. People who take

need to urinate frequently.

■ **Digitalis Medications:** This drug boost the pumping action and efficiency of each heart beat.-Lanoxin. You may be ordered to record the pulse rate frequently.

■ **Blood thinners:** People with heart failure are at risk for blood clots. To prevent this from happening, they may be ordered

to take a blood thinner.-heparin or Coumadin. Report any unusual bleeding immediately.

■ **Potassium:** This mineral is essential for controlling the rhythm of the heart. Since most diuretics “rob” the body of potassium, doctors often prescribe potassium, supplements. Take note: Common side effects of potassium supplements include nausea and diarrhea.

### How Do Lifestyle Choices Affect CHF?

■ **Smoking:** Tobacco smoking is a major cause of heart disease, including congestive heart failure.

■ **A High Fat Diet:** Consuming an abundance of fatty foods can lead to obesity and high cholesterol levels--- both of which contribute to heart problems.

■ **Excess Fluid Intake:** As you’ve learned, people with congestive heart failure often have a problem with edema. Drinking too much fluid can make this problem worse.

■ **A High Salt Diet:** Consuming too much salt can also cause people with CHF to retain excess fluid.

■ **Lack of Exercise;** People with heart failure who are inactive suffer from a steady decline. But, those who exercise (with their physician’s approval) typically show significant improvement.

■ **Being Overweight:** Carrying extra pounds puts stress on the heart, which is especially bad for people with CHF. (Their hearts are already

working overtime!)

■ **High Blood Pressure:** Having high blood pressure and not controlling it is a major risk for CHF.

■ **Diabetes:** Having diabetes and not controlling it can worsen congestive heart failure.

■ **Alcohol and/or Drug Abuse:** CHF tends to damage the liver. Overuse of alcohol or drugs puts additional stress on the liver.

■ **Stress:** Being constantly “stressed out” can raise blood pressure lev-

els permanently, putting more strain on the heart.

■ **Lack of Sleep:** Not getting enough rest can contribute to stress and leave the body unable to “fight” the CHF.

■ **Chronic Depression:** Studies have shown that chronic depression is linked with a higher risk of developing high blood pressure and heart disease.



## Tips for Helping Clients with CHF

### Body Weight

- Many CHF clients need to be weighed every day to check for increasing congestion and/or edema.
- Their medications may need to be adjusted if their weight is suddenly too high or too low. So, an accurate weight is very important!
- Be sure to weigh your clients on the same scale, at the same time of the day, and wearing the same amount of clothing.

### Activity and Rest

- If a CHF client is experiencing shortness of breath, be sure to encourage client to get plenty of rest.

- If your client is not short of breath or too tired, encourage light exercise.

### Watch for signs of drug toxicity

- Most CHF clients take a heart medication called digitalis. This drug can have a toxic effect of the body.
- Watch for - and report – any of the following:
  - Nausea
  - Vomiting
  - Diarrhea
  - Slow pulse
  - Headache
  - Increased shortness of breath.

### Intake and Output (I&O)

- People with CHF who take in more fluids than they excrete will develop edema. Because fluid balance is so important for CHF clients, you may be asked to record I&O amounts.
- Try to measure fluids at eye level for a more accurate reading.
- Follow Standard Precautions when measuring output.



### Observe your CHF clients closely

- Be sure to tell your supervisor if you notice your CHF clients adding salt to their food, taking over-the-counter medications, or not taking their prescribed medications.



- **Report** physical problems you observe with your CHF clients, such as:
  - Difficult breathing
  - Increased edema
  - Blue lips or Fingernails
  - Jaundice (yellowish skin or eyes)
  - Confusion
  - Dizziness

The American Heart Association 1-800-242-8721/ [www.amhrt.org](http://www.amhrt.org)

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

### Avoid Fatigue

- Note any activities that seem to bring on, or worsen, a client's fatigue.
- Alternate periods of activity with periods of rest.
- Remember that pain is a real energy zapper. If your CHF clients suffers from chronic pain, be sure to schedule periods of activity shortly after the clients pain medication.
- Ask your supervisor about getting some assistive devices for a fatigued CHF client, such as a shower chair, a bedside commode, a long handled bath brush and shoe horn, and an elevated toilet seat.
- Avoid rushing a CHF clients and allow for periodic rest breaks. (Plan for ten to fifteen minutes of rest for every hour or two of activity).
- Ask your clients to rate their fatigue from "zero" (no fatigue) to "ten" (the worst possible fatigue). Report the response to your supervisor.
- Listen to your clients.
- Let your words and actions show that you care.
- Allow your clients to make as many of their own decision a possible.
- Encourage client to find something to laugh about every day.
- Be patient with elderly clients who are dealing with disease.

### Manage Stress

- Try playing some music for your patient.
- Whenever possible, take time to really

## POST TEST

Please circle the best choice and then check your answers with educator. **You may submit this paper to your coordinator or send by mail to office.**

1. True or False

Heart Failure can also occurs when the heart cannot pump enough blood through the body.

2. True or False

The risk of developing heart failure is higher in people who are elderly, have diabetes or have hypertension.

3. True or False

Fatigue is a common symptom for people with congestive heart failure.

4. True or False

If your client takes ACE inhibitor for CHF, you should watch him carefully for any unusual bleeding.

5. True or False

In general, people with CHF survive longer if they make healthy lifestyle choices.

6. True or False

The most common symptoms of heart failure include shortness of breath, coughing, and swelling.

7. True or False

Heart failure causes people to feel tired only after strenuous activities.

8. Mr. Smith has CHF. Lately, she has been short of breath, very tired, and coughing frequently. In your daily work with her, you should:

- A. encourage her to take a long walk every day
- B. help her with her daily activities to keep her heart from being overworked
- C. tell her to drink lots of fluids to help clear up her cough
- D. reposition her only once a day so she can get some rest

9. He ask you to add salt to his food. You tell him:

- A. you can have the salt if you drink an extra glass of water
- B. extra salt will give you a headache
- C. I'll give you the salt if you promise to be good the rest of the day
- D. the doctor has ordered a low salt diet for you, and I have to follow his order

10. What kinds of foods your clients eat to follow a heart-healthy diet?

- A. bacon, cheeseburgers, and fries
- B. ice cream and yogurt
- C. vegetable and fruits
- D. All of the above



INSERVICE CREDIT: **1 HOUR**

SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYEE NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

EDUCATOR SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_