

## Help with Congestive Heart Failure

Your Cardiologist diagnoses you with Congestive Heart Failure. This can be quite frightening. But what exactly does this mean? Congestive Heart Failure; commonly abbreviated as CHF, it is a condition in which the heart can no longer adequately pump blood to the rest of the body. Because blood is needed for the nourishment and oxygenation of your body, a decrease in pump capability of the heart means that your heart has to work harder. Heart failure should not be confused with myocardial infarction (heart attack) or cardiac arrest. The term "heart failure" is misleading because the heart does not completely fail or stop. Heart failure can be mild and cause minor symptoms, or it may be severe or even life-threatening.

### CHF is differentiated into two categories:

**Systolic Heart Failure:** The heart's ability to contract is diminished, and therefore cannot eject enough blood to the rest of the body.

**Diastolic Heart Failure:** In diastolic heart failure, the heart's ability to relax is diminished, resulting in impaired filling of blood in to the heart between contractions.

**Signs and Symptoms:** The most common symptoms of CHF are shortness of breath with or without exertion, feeling tired, coughing, sleeping on two or more pillows at night, diminished exercise tolerance, leg swelling and other signs of fluid retention.

**Causes and Risk Factors:** CHF is caused by damage to the heart. It is associated with risk factors of high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, myocardial infarction (heart attack), heart valvular disease, diabetes and obesity.

### How do we diagnose CHF?

- **Electrocardiogram (EKG):** An EKG provides a picture of the electrical activity that causes the heart to beat. An EKG may detect conditions, such as an abnormal heart rhythm or a previous heart attack, that could cause heart failure.
- **Echocardiogram:** An echocardiogram uses ultrasound (high-frequency sound waves) to assess the size and function of the heart's chambers and the structure and function of the heart valves. A follow-up echocardiogram can be done to see if your heart function changes over time.
- **Stress testing:** An exercise test ("stress test") determines how well your heart performs during exercise. It is one way to look for signs of a shortage of blood supply to your heart caused by blockages in the coronary arteries. Our medical staff will see how your heart responds to exercise by looking at the EKG, blood pressure, and heart rate as you walk on a treadmill.
- **Heart (cardiac) catheterization:** Cardiac catheterization helps to measure how well the heart is functioning and provides pictures of the coronary arteries to look for blockages. During the test, a thin tube (the catheter) is inserted through a large blood vessel in the groin (or arm) and advanced into the heart. A dye is injected into the catheter to view the arteries and the structure of the heart by X-ray.

Although congestive heart failure is a serious condition, safe and effective treatments are available. Treatment for heart failure usually includes changes in diet and lifestyle, medications, and sometimes a device to keep the heart from producing abnormal rhythms. The medical staff at Heart and Health takes a diagnosis of CHF very seriously, and will come up with a plan specifically for you, one that will make you feel better and live longer.

**Reference: UpToDate.com**

**[http://www.uptodate.com/contents/epidemiology-and-causes-of-heart-failure?source=search\\_result&selectedTitle=8%7E150](http://www.uptodate.com/contents/epidemiology-and-causes-of-heart-failure?source=search_result&selectedTitle=8%7E150)**