

Congestive Heart Failure

KNOWLEDGE



how strong is your **heart?**

Understanding Congestive Heart Failure

Congestive heart failure (CHF) is a condition where the heart muscles are weak and your heart is not able to pump blood as well as it should. Since your heart doesn't pump blood properly, fluid can leak out of the blood vessels and into the lungs or other tissues. If fluid fills up the lungs, it makes it difficult to breathe or get enough oxygen.

CHF is a lifelong health problem. There is no way to reverse or cure CHF. With medications, diet and lifestyle changes, CHF can be controlled and managed. By controlling your CHF, you can:

- slow the progress of the disease
- maintain more function for a longer period of time
- Do more of what matters to you.

When to Call Your Doctor

The following are signs that your body is holding water. If you have any of these, call your doctor right away:

- Dry, hacking cough
- Worsening shortness of breath with activity or at rest
- Increased swelling in legs, feet and ankles
- Discomfort or swelling in the stomach
- Trouble sleeping because you can't breathe
- Cannot lie flat to sleep/ propping head up higher to sleep
- Loss of appetite
- New or worsening dizziness
- Weight gain of 2 or more pounds in a day
- Weight gain of 5 pounds or more in a week

Living with CHF

Lifestyle and diet changes are important to help you be successful at managing your CHF. Here's what you can do to help manage your CHF:

- **Weigh Yourself Daily:** Keeping track of your weight can help detect fluid buildup in your body before you see or feel it. Weigh yourself each morning after getting out of bed. If you gain 2-3 pounds in one day, or 5 pounds in a week, call your doctor.
- **Limit Fluids, Caffeine, and Alcohol Intake:** Limit your fluid intake to no more than 4-8 (8 oz.) cups of fluid each day. Caffeine makes your heart work harder, so limit your intake to 2-3 (8 oz.) cups each day. You should avoid drinking alcohol, but if you do, limit yourself to one drink.

- **Eat a Low-Sodium Diet:** Try to consume less than 1,500mg of sodium each day. Avoid or limit foods that are high in sodium, such as pre-packaged snacks, canned food, and condiments such as soy sauce, barbeque sauce, and olives. Choose low-sodium options when shopping for canned goods. Consider making homemade soups instead of canned.

take control

- **Avoid Saturated Fats and Trans Fats:** These are commonly found in meats, cheeses, snack foods, sweets, pre-packaged foods.
- **Read Food Labels:** Know what a proper serving size is, and be aware of how much sodium, fat, and added sugars a serving contains.
- **Take Medications Correctly:** Be sure to take all medication as it is prescribed by your doctor. If you can't afford a medication, talk to your doctor, nurse, or insurance company about your concerns, they may have resources to assist you.
- **Keep Scheduled Doctor Appointments:** It's important to keep all visits with your doctor, even when you are feeling well. Make a yearly visit to keep up with your vaccines for the flu, pneumonia, TDap, and others.

- **Have a Consistent Exercise Routine:** Daily exercise is important to maintain heart health and circulation. It can also improve your mood and help with weight loss. Check with your doctor before beginning an exercise program. Stop exercising immediately if you have shortness of breath or chest pain.
- **Stay Well:** Practice healthy habits to improve your overall health. If you are a smoker, consider quitting. Be aware of your cholesterol and blood pressure numbers. Maintain a healthy weight through diet and exercise to help lessen the strain on your heart. Learn ways to manage stress and anxiety, such as meditation.