

Do you want to know?

Congestive Heart Failure

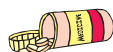
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What is it?

Congestive heart failure is a disease in which the heart muscle does not pump enough blood throughout the body. Weakened pumping will cause body fluid to back up into the lungs, kidneys and other parts of the body causing swelling in the arms, legs, ankles and feet.

What do you need to know?

Drugs



- Medications commonly used to treat congestive heart failure may include:
 - Digoxin (example: Lanoxin) – This medication helps the heart to pump stronger. Make sure to inform your physician when nausea, vomiting, or loss of appetite occur.
 - Diuretics (example: Lasix or Burinex) – This group of medications removes excess fluid from the body, thus easing the workload of the heart. Inform your physician in cases of low blood pressure and drowsiness.
 - Antihypertensive medications (example: Capoten) – are used to lower the blood pressure and make it easier for the heart to do its work.
 - Potassium supplements are used to replace the mineral potassium, which is washed out of the body by some diuretics. A low potassium level may irritate the heart. The physician may recommend foods high in potassium such as bananas, orange juice, tomato juice, dried apricots, and watermelon.
- Take the right medication as prescribed by your physician.

Diet



- Follow a low salt diet. Sodium (salt) causes your body to retain fluids, which can put extra strain on the heart.
- Read the labels of foods you buy because many prepared foods such as canned foods, crackers, cheese, pickles, soy sauce, sodas and cooked meat contain a lot of salt.
- Cut down on salt used in cooking and on the table.
- Avoid excessive alcohol use. Most physicians recommend no more than one alcoholic drink per day (wine, beer, or liquor). Alcohol weakens the heart muscle which can worsen congestive heart failure.
- Limit the amount of water and fluids as recommended by your physician. Extra fluids increase the load on the heart.

Activity



- Schedule periods of rest throughout the day and allow the heart to regain its strength. Perform activities up to tolerance level.
- Stop what you are doing if you feel shortness of breath or chest pain. Sit down and rest. If your tolerance level to activities decreases, inform your physician.
- Be moderate in activity and exercise. Inactivity weakens the heart and the body. Exercise is important. Short periods of moderate exercise such as walking three times a week is advisable. Rest after activity. Ask your physician for help in designing an exercise program for you.

Considerations:



- Weigh yourself every day at the same time with about the same amount of clothes on. Weight gain is an indication that you are retaining fluid that may cause shortness of breath. Notify the physician if the gain is 1 to 2 kg in 1 to 3 days.

The content of this educational leaflet is of general information. Ask your physician or health care provider if this content applies to you.

Prepared by the Nursing Services in coordination with other health care disciplines.

