

CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE (CHF)

What is it: Heart failure, sometimes known as congestive heart failure (CHF), occurs when your heart muscle can't pump blood to the rest of the body as well as it should. There are a multitude of reasons, the most common being Coronary artery disease (CAD), high blood pressure (HBP) and diabetes (DM). CHF is more common in people 65 and older, African Americans, persons that are overweight and those that have had previous heart attacks. Men have a higher rate of CHF than women (<https://medlineplus.gov/heartfailure.html#summary>).

Who is at risk: Those at highest risk for developing CHF are those diagnosed with HBP, CAD, MI, DM and those taking medications such as Avandia and Actos, other medications that may lead to heart failure are NSAIDs, and medications to treat HBP, cancer, blood conditions, neurological conditions and even some OTC medications. It is always best to check with your doctor and pharmacist if you take any medication to learn what the side effects of all of your medications are.

Causes: CHF usually develops after other conditions, such as Heart Attacks, High Blood Pressure, Coronary Artery Disease, Faulty heart valves, cardiomyopathy and even diseases such as diabetes, HIV, hyperthyroidism, hypothyroidism. Some viruses that attack the heart muscle, infections, allergic reactions, and certain medications can cause heart failure also.

Symptoms: Heart failure signs and symptoms may include: Shortness of breath, especially when lying down, fatigue, swelling of the ankles and feet, fast or irregular heart rate, persistent cough or wheezing, increased need to urinate at night, sudden weight gain, difficulty concentrating or decreased alertness.

How is it diagnosed: Physicians will do a thorough medical history and physical examination. Blood tests to check kidney, liver and thyroid functions are usually ordered and a test to check for the chemical N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide (NT-proBNP) will aid in the diagnosis of CHF. A chest x-ray will show an enlarged heart or fluid buildup in the lungs. An electrocardiogram can find abnormal heart rhythms. An Echocardiogram helps distinguish between systolic and diastolic heart failure and can measure ejection fraction- seeing how well the heart is pumping. Stress tests tell the doctor how well the heart responds under stress.

Complications: Complications can include kidney damage or kidney failure, heart valve problems, heart rhythm problems, liver damage. heart failure can be life-threatening. People with heart failure may have severe symptoms, and some may require heart transplantation or support with a ventricular assist device.

Home Treatment: It is always recommended that patients eat a balanced diet including restricting salt from the diet, get exercise as recommended by their physician, get plenty of rest, reduce stress and stop smoking. Many people report a better night's sleep when they sleep propped up or on a wedge, especially if they experience SOB when lying flat.

Since Heart Failure is a chronic condition it requires lifelong management which may include medication, surgery, and the implantation of medical devices.

Medications may include ACE inhibitors (such as Vasotec, Zestril and Capoten), Angiotensin II receptor blockers (like Cozaar and Diovan) or Beta Blockers (such as Coreg, Zebeta and Lopressor). Many people

with heart failure also take a diuretic to keep fluid from collecting in their body. Aldosterone antagonists, such as Aldactone or Inspra, are potassium-sparing diuretics.

Surgery may be needed to correct the underlying problem that led to heart failure. If blocked arteries are contributing to the heart failure, the doctor may recommend coronary artery bypass surgery

An ICD is a device similar to a pacemaker. It's implanted under the skin in your chest with wires leading through your veins and into your heart. This device monitors the heart's rhythm; it will pace the heart back into a normal rhythm should it stop or develop a dangerous rhythm. Ventricular assist devices (VADs), are implanted into the abdomen or chest. Sometimes VAD's are used as an alternative to a heart transplant by assisting the heart to pump more blood to the rest of the body.

Despite all the measures listed above, some people have such severe heart failure that surgery or medications don't help. For these patients, a heart transplant is the only option.

Did you know? For more articles on CHF go to: https://medlineplus.gov/news/fullstory_161011.html ,
https://medlineplus.gov/news/fullstory_161201.html ,
https://medlineplus.gov/news/fullstory_160932.html ,

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and <https://medlineplus.gov/heartfailure.html>