

Heart Failure (HF)

The heart is a muscle that works as a pump. In HF, the heart does not pump well so fluid builds up in your body, heart and lungs. This limits the amount of oxygen in your system. An ejection fraction or EF measurement shows the type and severity of heart failure and how well treatment is working. The ejection fraction is the percent of blood that the heart pumps with each beat. A normal EF is 50-65%. The EF is most often measured with a painless test called an echocardiogram or echo.

Heart failure can involve either the left, right or both sides of the heart. There are 2 types of heart failure. Systolic heart failure is when the heart is weak and the EF is less than 40%. Diastolic heart failure is when the heart is stiff and the walls are thick. The EF may be normal. This type of HF may be caused by high blood pressure.

Causes

Congestive heart failure can be caused by:

- A heart attack
- Damaged heart muscle or valve
- An irregular heart rhythm
- A birth defect
- Lung disease
- Diabetes
- Anemia
- High blood pressure
- An overactive thyroid
- A virus infection
- Age

HF symptoms may come on slowly or quickly. It is important to watch for and report symptoms to your doctor. **Weigh yourself every morning at the same time** and write your weight down in your log.

Call 911 if you have:

- Shortness of breath that does not go away when you rest
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Chest pain or pressure
- Rapid irregular heart beats or feel a "racing heart"

Call your doctor if you have:

- A 2 - 3 pound weight gain over a 1 to 2 day period
- Difficulty breathing at rest or when lying flat
- Waking up breathless
- Frequent, dry, hacking cough
- Increased tiredness, weakness
- Wheezing with activity
- Dizziness or confusion
- Swollen feet, ankles, legs or abdomen
- Lack of appetite or nausea

Activity Limits

- No strenuous activity or exercise until your doctor says it is okay.
- Use stairs slowly.
- Rest often, nap in the afternoon when you can.
- Do low level exercise such as walking each day as instructed by your doctor.
- Raise your feet and legs when sitting.

Healthy Eating

- Eat a healthy balanced diet.

- Limit salt and salty foods. Too much sodium (salt) holds fluid in your body and makes your heart work harder.
- A low sodium diet - about 2000 mg or less per day
- If your appetite is poor, try to eat a small meal or snack every 3 hours.

Home Care Instructions

- Decrease your risk factors - stop using tobacco, avoid alcohol, limit caffeine, lose weight if needed and decrease stress.
- Keep all scheduled appointments with your doctor. Take your daily log with blood pressure readings, pulse and weights.
- Avoid working or exercising in very hot weather (over 80 degrees with heat index or over 70 degrees if humid).
- Avoid cold, moist weather (less than 30 degrees with wind chill factor). If you must go outside, cover your mouth with a scarf.
- Do not wear tight socks.