

Questions About Congestive Heart Failure

1. What is congestive heart failure?

Congestive heart failure is a condition in which the heart has difficulty pumping blood. The heart can be damaged after a heart attack or have changes from long term high blood pressure, leaky valves or heavy alcohol use.

2. What symptoms happen with congestive heart failure?

Many patients develop fluid retention and then get shortness of breath. There may also be bloating, swollen feet, legs or ankles, increased urination at night, sudden weight gain or increased fatigue.

3. What tests are performed to make this diagnosis?

The most common test for congestive heart failure is an echocardiogram. This test uses sound waves to form a picture of the heart while you lay on your side. The test can show whether your heart is enlarged, if your heart valves are narrow or leaky and how well your heart pumps. A cardiac catheterization may be ordered to further diagnose what caused your heart failure.

4. What medication is used to control symptoms and improve my heart?

You will be given certain medications that will make it easier for your heart to pump, that will lower your blood pressure and that will remove extra fluid from your body. Many of these drugs help improve symptoms and survival with heart failure.



5. What lifestyle changes should I make to control congestive heart failure?

Managing heart failure can be challenging. With medications and lifestyle changes, heart failure can be stabilized. The following tips are recommended:

- Take your medications as ordered. Use a medicine box for organization.
- Remain active every day but take breaks as needed.
- Keep track of your weight every day. Watch for symptom changes.
- Maintain a normal weight to decrease the stress on the heart.
- Do not smoke.
- Limit the amount of salt in your diet. Do not use table salt or cook with salt. Avoid processed, pre-packaged foods such as chips and canned soup.
- Know how to get in touch with your health care provider.

6. When should I seek medical attention if my symptoms get worse?

Sudden weight gain usually means extra fluid. You should contact your health care provider if you gain more than 2-3 pounds overnight or more than 3-5 pounds in a week. If you have severe shortness of breath or unrelieved chest pain, you should seek medical attention immediately.
