What can I do to manage my emotions?

Do what you can to reduce your stress and anxiety!

- Learning to live with CHF may mean dealing with fear, anger, anxiety and depression. Talk about your feelings with family and friends or go to counseling
- Do relaxation exercises such as mediation, imagining peaceful scenes and listening to music
- Make reasonable plans, for example an exercise program consisting of walking instead of running. **ALWAYS CHECK WITH YOUR PROVIDER BEFORE BEGINNING AN EXERCISE PROGRAM**
- Be active in your treatment plan and lifestyle changes so you feel more in control

CHF is a life-changing disease. You will need the support and encouragement of your family. Join a local support group.

- *American Heart Association 1-800-242-8721 www.americanheart.org*
- *National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute 1-301-251-1222 www.nhlbi.nih.gov*
- *Mended Hearts, Inc. 1-214-706-1442*

The Coronary Club, Inc. 1-216-444-3690

VA Northern Indiana Health Care System

Serving:

South Campus:
1700 East 38th Street
Marion, Indiana 46953-4589

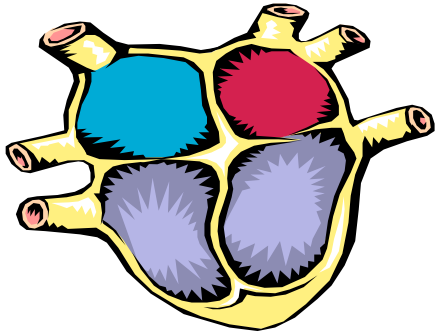
North Campus:
2121 Lake Avenue
Ft. Wayne, Indiana 46805-5100

And

Community Based Outpatient Clinics

Disclaimer:
The material contained in this fact sheet is given for your information and should not be considered as medical advice. Consult your healthcare provider for medical help.

CHF



Living with Congestive Heart Failure

Created for you by VA NIHCS's Patient and Family Health Education Education Department

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What is Congestive Heart Failure?

CHF is a condition in which the heart does not pump or move the blood as well as it should.

What are the Warning Signs of CHF?

- Shortness of breath, wheezing or coughing when you are very active
- Weakness or tiredness
- Problems breathing when lying down because the heart is not pumping as well as it should
- Swollen ankles or feet
- Dizzy spells
- Waking up at night coughing or having shortness of breath

Causes of CHF

- Usually occurs when another problem such as coronary artery disease, heart attack, high blood pressure, heart valve disease, or heart muscle damage makes the heart weak
- A weakened heart is unable to pump enough blood through the body
- Lungs not receiving enough blood may fill with fluid making it difficult to breathe
- Kidneys not receiving enough blood cannot rid the body of excess fluids causing feet and ankles to swell
- Brain not receiving enough blood can cause dizziness

What tests will I need?

Your provider will probably suspect CHF based on your medical history, symptoms and physical exam. Blood and urine tests, a chest x-ray, an electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG) may be ordered to confirm CHF.

What medicines will I need?

Several different medicines are used to help. You may have blood tests done to see what your potassium level and kidney function is depending on the type and strength of medicines you are taking

- ACE inhibitors help dilate your arteries and lower your blood pressure
- Diuretics help you urinate more often, keeping fluid from building up in your body and lungs so to help you breath better
- Beta-blockers improve blood flow and help prevent some heart rhythm problems
- Digoxin helps the heart pump well

Be sure your provider knows all the pills you take, even over-the counter pills, vitamins, minerals, herbs.

What can I do to help myself?

Activity

- Take medication exactly as prescribed by your doctor
- Keep track of your weight
- Stop smoking
- Rest and relax
- Avoid people with colds and flu
- Reduce dust and humidity in your home
- Plan activities so that you do not get over tired
- Find ways to control your stress
- Monitor your blood pressure
- Use oxygen if ordered especially at night

Diet

- Eat healthy foods from all 5food groups
- Avoid alcohol
- Use less salt since this will lead to holding in water that makes the heart work harder
- Look for foods that are sodium-free or very low sodium. Avoid foods that contain sodium products such as sodium benzoate and MSG
- Use Mrs. Dash as an alternative to salt
- Avoid frozen dinners that have more than 400 mg of sodium
- Avoid fast foods and buy fresh foods
- Eat less cholesterol and fat since this will clog up the arteries in your body
- Eat potassium rich foods such as bananas, oranges, potatoes, peas, turkey and fish since this helps the heart muscles contract

When do I call the Doctor?

- When your breathing becomes more difficult
- You notice you're getting tired faster
- Coughing at night
- Dry cough that does not go away
- Gaining 3 or more pounds in a week
- Dizzy or fainting spells
- Urinating less frequently
- Chest tightness or pain
- Feet or ankles swell more than usual
- Coughing up yellow, green or pink sputum
- Pulse drops below 60 beats per minute or rises above 120 beats per minute
- Possible side effects of medications such as: changes in heartbeat, changes in urination, nausea, vomiting or confusion