

# Patient Education



## Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)

You have been diagnosed with: Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)

Your nurse needs to weigh you before you go home.

Your weight at discharge is: \_\_\_\_\_kg

### Signs to look for when you go home:

- Feeling more short of breath than is normal for you.
- Weight gain of 1.5kg (3 lbs) in 1 day or 2.5kg (5 lbs) or more in 1 week.
- Increased swelling of your feet, ankles, legs or stomach.
- A dry hacking cough.
- Feeling more tired than normal and having no energy.

### What do I do if I have any of these signs?

- **Call your family doctor or nurse practitioner and make an appointment.**
- **If you are having chest pain, go to the nearest emergency department.**

### What is Congestive Heart Failure?

Heart failure is a condition in which your heart does not pump as well and it needs to work harder to keep blood moving through your body. Heart failure has many causes and develops gradually. The most common causes of heart failure are damage to the heart muscle from heart attacks, leaking heart valves or scarring of the heart muscle from untreated high blood pressure or even heart rhythm problems.

### Treatments

CHF is treated with adopting "healthy habits" and taking regular medication. The treatment for CHF aims to:

- **Reduce the work of the heart.**
- **Increase the heart's strength to pump.**
- **Control the retention of fluid.**

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## What you should do at home:

Lifestyle changes are important. They help control your symptoms and improve quality of life. Things you should do are:

- Reduce the amount of sodium (salt) in your diet.
- Limit the amount of fluids you drink (water, soup, tea, coffee, etc).
- Limit the alcohol you drink.
- Stop smoking.
- Balance activity with rest – getting regular sleep each night is important, and sometimes a nap during the day is recommended.
- Include exercise as part of your daily routine. Each patient is different, so check with your doctor about what types of exercise is safe for you.
- Weigh yourself every morning after emptying your bladder and before having breakfast. Keep a record of your weight and take it with you to all appointments.

## Medication Safety

Practice medication safety by:

- Always using the same pharmacy.
- If you have to use more than one pharmacy, make sure you let the pharmacy team know all of the medications you are taking at every visit.
- Bringing your medications with you to your community pharmacy for your pharmacist to review.
- Bringing your medications with you to every visit with your doctor, specialist or nurse.

- Taking old medications to your pharmacy to make sure they are disposed of safely.

## Medication Safety

Sometimes many medications are needed to manage heart failure. When taken regularly, medication is effective at relieving symptoms.

Some medications you might take are:

- ✓ **ACE inhibitors**  
(any drug that ends in “pril”)
  - Opens the heart vessels and helps to decrease the heart’s workload.
- ✓ **ARB’s**  
(any drug that ends in “sartan”)
  - Helps relax your blood vessels, which lowers your blood pressure and makes it easier for your heart to pump blood.
- ✓ **Water pills**  
(hydrochlorothiazide or furosemide)
  - Gets rid of water and sodium through the kidneys to help decrease swelling and shortness of breath.
- ✓ **Digoxin**
  - Used to strengthen the heart.
- ✓ **Beta-blockers**  
(any drug that ends in “lol”)
  - Helps to reduce irregular heart rhythms and strengthens the heart to pump blood.

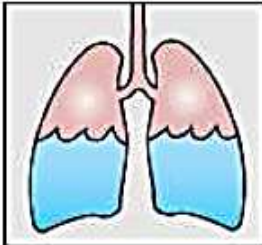
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## Heart Failure Action Plan -

Every morning, when you get up, check for signs that your heart failure is getting worse.  
Look for:



### Changes in breathing

Ask yourself:

- Can I breathe as well as I usually can?
- Am I getting out of breath doing things I can normally do without a problem?
- Am I coughing more than usual?
- Did I use more pillows than usual to sleep last night?



### Changes in weight

Weigh yourself every morning after urinating but before eating.  
Write down your weight on a calendar. Then ask yourself:

- Has my weight gone up or gone down compared to yesterday?  
If so, by how many pounds?
- Has my weight gone up or gone down compared to a week ago?  
If so, by how many pounds?



### New or worse swelling

Ask yourself:

- Are my ankles more swollen than usual?
- Do my socks or shoes feel tighter?
- Do my clothes feel tighter at the waist?
- Do my rings fit more snugly?



### Changes in your ability to do everyday things

Ask yourself:


- Can I do all the things I normally do, such as get dressed on my own, make meals, or go for walks?
- Do I feel dizzy or more tired than usual?
- Do I have any new symptoms, like pressure or pain in my chest?
- Does my heartbeat feel strange or irregular?
- Do I feel like I might pass out?

See the next page to find out what you should do if any of these changes occur.

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Symptom	Action
<p>If you have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No trouble breathing</li> <li>• No chest pain</li> <li>• No weight change overnight or over the last week</li> <li>• The usual amount of ankle swelling</li> <li>• No change in ability to be active</li> </ul>	<p>Your symptoms are under control.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep taking your medications every day, as ordered</li> <li>• Keep weighing yourself every day and writing down your weight</li> <li>• Follow a low-salt diet</li> <li>• Keep all your medical appointments</li> </ul>
<p>If you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need more pillows than usual to sleep</li> <li>• Have more trouble breathing when you are active</li> <li>• Have more coughing than usual</li> <li>• Increased shortness of breath with activity</li> <li>• Gain 2 to 3 pounds overnight, or 5 pounds in one week</li> <li>• Have more swelling than usual</li> </ul>	<p>You might need to take extra medicine.</p> <p>Call your doctor's office to find out what you should do.</p> <p>Doctor name: _____</p> <p>Phone #: _____</p>
<p>If you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have trouble breathing when you are resting, or you can't stop coughing</li> <li>• Wheeze or feel chest tightness when you are resting</li> <li>• Wake up at night because you can't breathe well</li> <li>• Feel dizzy, very tired, or like you might fall</li> <li>• Gain or lose more than 5 pounds compared to your normal weight</li> </ul>	<p>You probably need to <u>see</u> a doctor right away.</p> <p>Call your doctor <b>now</b>.</p> <p>Doctor name: _____</p> <p>Phone #: _____</p>
<p>If you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have trouble breathing that does not get better no matter what you do</li> <li>• Feel like you can't breathe, or start to turn blue</li> <li>• Cough up frothy or pink saliva</li> <li>• Have pain or pressure in your chest, or you have other signs of a heart attack</li> <li>• Have a fast or uneven heartbeat that will not go away or makes you feel dizzy or lightheaded</li> <li>• Feel very confused</li> <li>• Faint</li> </ul>	 <p>Call 9-1-1 for an ambulance right away</p>

\*\*\*Images based on the Heart Failure Action plan provided by Access III of the Lower Cape Fear, Inc. and adapted from UpToDate® from [www.uptodate.com](http://www.uptodate.com) ©2013 UpToDate®.

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