

Heart Failure

With heart failure, also called congestive heart failure, the heart muscle is weakened and does not pump as strongly as it should. The blood flow slows and fluid can build up in your lungs or other parts of your body. This does not mean that your heart has stopped pumping blood. Because heart failure does not go away, you will need to learn how to manage your condition.

Causes of Heart Failure

- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Heart valve problems
- Lung diseases
- An infection or virus
- Heavy alcohol or drug use
- Heart problems at birth
- Thyroid or kidney disease

Your Care

- Take your medicines as ordered by your doctor.
- Weigh yourself every morning at the same time. Keep a record of your daily weights.
- Limit salt or sodium in foods and drinks.
- Call your doctor for any of the signs listed below—do not delay calling.
- Pay attention to how you are feeling.
- Exercise each day, but rest as needed.
- Put your feet up to reduce ankle swelling.
- Keep your doctor appointments.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Stop smoking.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Get the flu vaccine each year. Talk to your doctor about the pneumonia vaccine.
- Limit your daily liquids if ordered by your doctor.

Call your doctor right away if you:

- Gain 2 pounds or 1 kilogram in a day or 3 to 5 pounds or 1 to 2 kilograms in 5 days
- Have swelling in your legs, feet, hands or abdomen or feel that your shoes, waistband or rings are tighter
- Feel short of breath
- Use more pillows when you sleep or need to sleep in a chair
- Cough at night or have increased cough or chest congestion
- Are more tired or weak
- Have a poor appetite or nausea
- Feel dizzy or confused
- Urinate less often

Call 911 right away if you:

- Feel short of breath even with rest
- Have chest pain, pressure or tightness
- Faint
- Have rapid, irregular heartbeats

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.