

Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)

What is CHF?

In congestive heart failure, a person's heart is weakened and unable to pump enough blood to meet the body's needs. It can be caused by conditions such as high blood pressure and coronary artery disease. The heart's inability to effectively pump blood can cause a buildup of fluid in the lungs, liver, arms, legs and other parts of the body.

How prevalent is CHF?

According to the American Heart Association, about 5.7 million Americans have heart failure.

Its most common causes include coronary artery disease and cardiomyopathy. Other causes include congenital heart disease, heart attack, damaged heart valves, and some types of abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias).

What are some risk factors for CHF?

You may have one or more factors that increase your risk of CHF.

- High blood pressure
- Coronary artery disease
- Heart attack
- Irregular heartbeats
- Diabetes and some diabetes medications
- Sleep apnea
- Congenital heart defects
- Viruses

- Alcohol use
- Kidney conditions

What are some symptoms of CHF?

- Fatigue and weakness
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Reduced ability to exercise
- Persistent cough or wheezing with white or pink blood-tinged phlegm
- Swelling (legs, ankles, feet, or abdomen)
- Sudden weight gain from fluid retention
- Lack of appetite; nausea
- Difficulty concentrating

When should I call for help?

Call your doctor if you notice a new or worsening symptom such as:

- Sudden weight gain (2 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in 5 days)
- Shortness of breath while resting
- Swelling in the legs, ankles or abdomen
- Pain in the abdomen
- Trouble sleeping
- Dry, hacking cough
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling weak or tired

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you experience:

- Fainting
- Fast and irregular heartbeat, especially without other symptoms present
- A severe and crushing pain in your chest

Living better with CHF

Patients can manage CHF and improve quality of life while minimizing the risk of complications and hospitalization.

- Take all medication as prescribed
- Weigh yourself daily. Report a rapid weight gain to your health care professional (2 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in 5 days).
- Follow a heart-healthy diet low in sodium and high in whole grains and fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Exercise
- Avoid alcohol
- Don't smoke
- Rest when you're tired.
- See your doctor regularly

What can make CHF get worse?

Although heart failure often can be controlled by taking medication and making lifestyle changes, it also can become suddenly worse. Reasons for this include:

- Angina (chest pain from a lack of blood flow to the heart)
- Heart attack
- Consuming too much salt
- Taking medications incorrectly
- Infections
- New and abnormal heart rhythms

For more information, contact your physician.

Source: www.cdc.gov, www.heart.org, www.niams.nih.gov, www.nih.gov and www.mayoclinic.com