CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE
PATIENT TEACHING
What is Heart Failure?

Congestive Heart Failure occurs when the heart loses its ability to pump enough blood to meet the body’s needs. Because the heart is not pumping blood properly, excess fluid can accumulate.

Fluid can accumulate in the lungs and result in pulmonary edema or shortness of breath. Sometimes patients will experience swelling of the feet and ankles, or in the abdomen.
What Causes Heart Failure?

Congestive Heart Failure can be caused by a number of conditions that damage the heart muscle, including heart attacks, or heart infections, coronary artery disease, untreated hypertension, excessive alcohol intake, smoking or recreational drug use.

Heart failure can also be caused by damage to, or abnormalities in the heart valves or an irregular heartbeat.

Major risk factors include smoking, high cholesterol levels, hypertension, diabetes and obesity. Many of these risk factors can be controlled through lifestyle changes or medications.
Symptoms and Treatment

Symptoms of Congestive Heart Failure include:

* Shortness of breath with activity or when lying flat
* A dry constant cough which may be worse at night
* Swelling in the feet, legs, or abdomen
* Weakness
* Fatigue
* Sudden weight gain.

Prevention is the best treatment. A low sodium diet, regular exercise, consuming alcohol in moderation and not smoking are examples of healthy lifestyle changes.
Medication Management

Heart failure medications are used to reduce your symptoms and manage your condition. There are several classifications of heart medications: beta blockers, ACE inhibitors, diuretics (fluid pills), and Digoxin. Familiarize yourself with your medications and follow your doctor’s instructions. Unfortunately, one of the most common reasons for re-hospitalization for heart failure is not taking medications properly.

Carry a medication list and know the names and doses of the drugs you are taking. Take your medicine at the same time every day. Keep your medications in the original container and you may want to use a weekly pill box to ensure that you don’t miss a dose. Make sure that you remember to call in refills before you run out of pills.

We have been asked to provide you with intravenous (IV) medication to assist with the management of your congestive heart failure symptoms.
Inotropic Therapy

Your doctor has prescribed an inotropic therapy to help manage the symptoms of your heart failure. This medication is administered through an IV using an electronic pump. You will be taught to manage the administration of the medication, as well as maintenance of your IV catheter. The inotropic medication stimulates the injured or weakened heart to pump harder to send blood through the body. It will improve symptoms of shortness of breath and swelling in the legs and abdomen.

You have been provided with two ambulatory infusion pumps to administer your medication. You will alternate them each time you change your medication bag. You can have the second pump completely set up before disconnecting the first one, so that there is no interruption in the medication administration. If your pump is malfunctioning, notify the pharmacy and it will be replaced immediately. (Please refer to the patient teaching instructions provided in your new patient packet) The pumps are much smaller than those used in the hospital and can be packed in a fanny pack so you can do your normal daily activities
The pharmacy will deliver your medication weekly and it will need to be stored in the refrigerator. A new supply will automatically be delivered each week. If there is a mishap with a bag please notify the pharmacist, so that you always have enough medication to last until the next delivery arrives. There should always be at least one medication bag in your refrigerator. Remember to use the oldest bags first – pay attention to the expiration dates!

When changing your bags, do not flush the IV catheter. This will inadvertently give you a bolus (dose) of the medication instead of the slow steady rate that the pump delivers. If you have a double lumen catheter, keep the pump on the same side each time you hook up. You will be taught by your nurse how to flush the other lumen. Your IV dressing will be changed by your nurse.
Monitoring your Weight

It is extremely important to monitor your weight daily. An increase in weight can be an early indication of worsening of your congestive heart failure.

Each morning before breakfast and after urinating, weigh yourself. You should have on the same amount of clothing, and use the same scale in the same spot daily. Record your weight on your chart.

Call your nurse or pharmacist if you experience a 2-3 pound weight gain over a 2 day period or 5 pounds in one week.

If caught early, an additional diuretic (fluid pill) can be prescribed and possibly avoid the need for re-hospitalization from fluid overload.
Salt and Fluid Restrictions

Your doctor may have prescribed a sodium (salt) and/or fluid restriction. You should familiarize yourself with the amount of salt and fluids you are allowed each day. Standard restrictions for patients with congestive heart failure are 2 grams of sodium and 1 liter of fluid daily.

Salt causes the body to hold onto water causing an increase in body weight, swelling and shortness of breath. If you eat too much salt or drink too much fluid, your body’s water content may increase and make your heart work harder. Take the salt shaker off the table – but that alone is not enough! Learn to read the labels on your foods. Avoid processed foods and canned soups and vegetables. Choose fresh or frozen vegetables instead. Processed meats, like bacon, ham, bologna or hot dogs often are high in sodium. When you go out to eat, ask your server to have the cook prepare your meal without added salt.
In addition to restricting your salt intake, you need to monitor the amount of fluid you drink daily. Plan out your fluid intake to include the amount of water needed to take your medications, as well as a drink with meals. A liter of fluid a day is probably much less than you are used to drinking, and you don’t want to consume all your daily allotment by lunchtime!

Don’t forget to include the fluids in the foods you are eating, particularly soups and broths. Use hard candies or ice chips in moderation for dry mouth throughout the day.
Remember, you are the most important member of your care team!

To avoid a trip back to the hospital

✓ Take your oral medications as prescribed

✓ Weigh yourself daily and notify your RN or pharmacist of any increase in your weight

✓ Restrict your salt and fluid intake

✓ Administer your IV inotropic medication as ordered and call the pharmacy with any problems
Weight Chart

***Call your nurse or pharmacist if you have 2-3 lb weight gain in 2 days or a 5 lb weight gain in a week.

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When to Call HomeChoice Partners

✓ If your weight increases 2-3 pounds in a day or 5 pounds in a week

✓ If either one of your infusion pumps malfunctions

✓ If you notice any redness or drainage on the skin around your catheter

✓ If you have any questions or problems regarding your infusion