

## CHF

Congestive Heart Failure (CHF, Heart Failure) is a term that is often heard but not well understood by many. CHF can be a serious condition but by learning about and taking care of it one can live longer and feel healthier. Your heart pumps blood through the body and when the heart doesn't keep up, this is called heart failure. Kind of like if you were in line at a toll booth and there was a slow moving toll booth operator. Cars would start to back up and a long line would develop, then cars in the back would look for other lines to get through the toll booth. In CHF, your heart doesn't stop but becomes an inefficiently beating pump. When the heart doesn't keep up, blood backs up entering into your heart. As the blood backs up, it causes you to feel tired, run down, and short of breath. Blood backs up in your veins causing it to leak out of the veins into your lungs causing shortness of breath, into your abdomen causing stomach to bloat up, and into your legs causing them to swell.

Problems that weaken the muscles of the heart lead to CHF. Some causes include: Coronary Artery Disease (clogged arteries around the heart), High Blood Pressure, Faulty Heart Valves, and Cardiomyopathy (diseases of the heart muscle). There are many symptoms that can occur with CHF which some or all can be present. Common symptoms include: shortness of breath, fatigue, rapid weight gain, leg and feet swelling, coughing, rapid or irregular heartbeats, dizziness, fainting, chest pain, nausea, bloating and tenderness of the abdomen, and decreased urination.

Fortunately there are many treatments available to improve this condition. Limiting the amount of salt you take in, pacing your activities to avoid getting overexerted, elevating your legs to keep the leg swelling down, and medications prescribed by your doctor can control CHF. There are a variety of medications that work differently and can be individualized by your physician depending on the situation. Cutting back on sodium (table salt) is an important part in treating CHF as your heart won't have to work as hard. Most people with CHF are advised to limit the sodium intake to 2000 milligrams (one teaspoon) a day. This can be done by hiding the salt shaker, choosing fresh foods instead of prepared foods, and reading the food labels. Low sodium foods generally contain 140mg of sodium or less, and sodium free foods contain less than 5mg per serving.

As always, if you are having any of the above symptoms, consult with your physician for a proper diagnosis. Here's to your good health.