

Focus on:

# Congestive Heart Failure

REFERENCE



**“Heart failure is a serious condition. About 5 million people in the U.S. have heart failure, and the number is growing. Each year, another 550,000 people are diagnosed for the first time. It contributes to or causes about 300,000 deaths each year.”**

*~ National Heart Lung and Blood Institute*

## What is CHF?

CHF is a condition in which the heart can't pump enough blood throughout the body. This does not mean that your heart has stopped or is about to stop working. It means that your heart is not able to pump blood the way that it should. The heart can't fill with enough blood or pump with enough force, or both.

Over time, heart failure develops as the pumping action of the heart grows weaker. It can affect both sides of the heart, or just the left or right side. In most cases the heart's left side is affected and can't pump enough oxygen-rich blood to the rest of the body. With right-sided failure, the heart can't effectively pump blood to the lungs where the blood picks up oxygen.

The weakening of the heart's pumping ability causes:

- > Blood and fluid to “back up” into the lungs
- > Buildup of fluid in the feet, ankles, and legs
- > Tiredness and shortness of breath

## Causes

Heart failure is caused by other diseases or conditions that damage or overwork the heart muscle. The heart muscle then weakens over time and is not able to pump blood as well as it should.

The leading causes of heart failure are:

- > Coronary Artery Disease (CAD)
- > High blood pressure
- > Diabetes

CAD, including angina and heart attack, is the most common underlying cause of heart failure. People who have or have had a heart attack are at high risk of developing heart failure.

Most people with heart failure also have high blood pressure, and about one-third have diabetes.

## Other Causes

Other heart diseases and conditions that can lead to heart failure are:

- > Cardiomyopathy (a disease of the heart muscle)
- > Diseases of the heart valves
- > Abnormal heartbeats or arrhythmias
- > Congenital heart defects (a heart defect or problem you are born with)



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## Who Is At Risk?

Heart failure can happen to anyone, but it's more common in people 65 years of age and older and African-Americans. African-Americans are more likely to have heart failure and suffer more severely from it. They are more likely to:

- > Develop symptoms at an earlier age
- > Have their heart failure get worse faster
- > Have more hospital visits
- > Die from heart failure

Men have a higher rate of heart failure than women. However, more women have heart failure because many more women live into their seventies and eighties when heart failure is common.

## Signs and Symptoms

Some common signs and symptoms are:

- > Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- > Feeling tired
- > Swelling in the ankles, feet, legs, and sometimes the abdomen

**“Excessive fluid in the lungs can cause a life-threatening condition called acute pulmonary edema.”**

Shortness of breath and feeling tired are caused by the buildup of fluid in the lungs and around the lungs. When symptoms start, you may feel tired and short of breath after routine physical exertion, like climbing two flights of stairs. As heart failure progresses, the symptoms get worse. You may begin to feel tired and short of breath after simple activities, like getting dressed or walking across the room. Some people have shortness of breath when lying flat.

Fluid buildup in the lungs can also cause a cough. The cough is worse at night and when you are lying down. Excessive fluid in the lungs can cause a life-threatening condition called acute pulmonary edema. This condition requires emergency treatment.

Swelling is from the buildup of fluid in your body (edema). Other signs of fluid buildup are:

- > Weight gain
- > Frequent urination

- > Quitting smoking if you smoke
- > Losing weight if you are overweight

## Treatment

The goals of treatment are to:

- > Treat the underlying cause of your heart failure
- > Improve your symptoms and quality of life
- > Stop your heart failure from getting worse
- > Prolong your life span

Your doctor will continue to treat the underlying diseases or conditions (such as coronary artery disease, high blood pressure, or diabetes) that caused heart failure.

The treatment for heart failure includes:

- > Lifestyle changes
- > Medicines
- > Specialized care for those in the most advanced stage of heart failure

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## TIPS



## Prevention

Things you can do to reduce your risk include:

- > Eating a heart-healthy diet low in salt, saturated fat, and cholesterol



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