Heart Failure

Heart failure happens when the heart muscle does not work normally. This means your heart does not pump blood efficiently for your body to work well. This may cause blood to back up into the lungs or cause your lower legs to swell. Heart failure is a long-term (*chronic*) condition. It is important for you to take good care of yourself and follow your caregivers' treatment plan.

SYMPTOMS

- Shortness of breath with mild exercise or while at rest.
- A persistent cough.
- Abnormal swelling in the feet and legs.
- Unexplained sudden weight gain.
- Fatigue and loss of energy.
- Feeling light-headed or close to fainting.
- Chest or abdominal pain.

CAUSES

- Coronary artery disease.
- High blood pressure.
- Heart attacks.
- Abnormal heart valves.
- Lung disease.
- Diabetes.

MEDICAL EVALUATION MAY REQUIRE:

- Electrocardiogram (*EKG*).
- Chest x-ray.
- Blood tests.
- Exercise stress test.
- Echocardiogram.
- Angiogram.
- Radionuclide ventriculography.

The symptoms of heart failure can improve with proper treatment. Medications, lifestyle changes or surgical intervention may be necessary to treat heart failure. Heart medications prescribed include those that lower blood pressure, strengthen contractility, and improve circulation. A diuretic or "water pill" may also be prescribed so excess fluid can be removed from the body. Surgical intervention may include procedures that open blocked arteries or repair damaged heart valves. In some cases, a pacemaker is need to help the heart pump better. Lifestyle changes include quitting smoking, eating a healthy diet, limiting salt intake and limiting alcoholic drinks. Exercise as told by your caregiver.

Salt increases fluid retention and should be avoided. Stay away from food made with a lot of salt. For example, stay away from chips, pretzels, pickles, olives, and canned foods. Eat a 2000 milligram salt (*sodium*) diet or as told by your doctor. Weigh yourself each morning after you urinate but before you eat breakfast. Keep a record of your weight to show your caregiver. A sudden weight gain can mean fluid buildup. Tell your caregiver if you gain 3 or more pounds (1.4 kilograms) in a day or 5 pounds (2.3 kilograms) in a week.

Make a list of every medicine, vitamin, or herbal supplement you are taking. Keep the list with you at all times. Show it to your caregiver at every visit. Keep the list up to date. Ask your caregiver or pharmacist to to write an explanation of each medicine you are taking.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Increased breathing, shortness of breath, severe cough or coughing up blood.
- Severe chest or abdominal pain, or unusual heart palpitations.
- Weakness or numbness in your face or on one side of the body.

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