

## Patient Education Congestive Heart Failure

### Dear Patient:

Congestive heart failure (CHF) occurs when the heart pumps less blood than normal. The blood which comes back to the heart, backs up into the blood vessels causing excess fluid. The excess fluid leaks into the lungs causing them to become fluid-filled or “congested” and can also collect in the feet and ankles making them swell.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of congestive heart failure (CHF) are:

1. A weight gain of three or more pounds in a day
2. Feet, ankles, or other parts of your body are swollen
3. Difficulty breathing
4. Feeling tired and unable to do what you could the day before
5. Chest pain

### Tests and Monitoring

Your doctor will order a medical examination which may include some or all of the following:

1. Chest x-ray to evaluate the amount of fluid built up in your lungs.
2. Blood tests to check your heart and kidney function.
3. Electrocardiogram (EKG) to measure your heart rate and rhythm.
4. Echocardiogram is an ultrasound of your heart which shows the structure of the heart and how well it is pumping.
5. Daily weights to measure how much of your weight is “water weight”.
6. Cardiac monitor to continuously observe your heart rate and rhythm.

### Treatment

**Activity** — You will be confined to bed or on limited activity. We will encourage an increase in your activity as soon as your condition allows. If you tire easily, alternate activities with rest to conserve your energy.

**Diet** — You will be placed on a low salt/ low sodium diet. We will monitor your intake and output by keeping track of all the fluid you drink and the amount you urinate.

**Medication** — Oxygen may be given to increase oxygen levels and to ease shortness of breath. An intravenous (IV) catheter is needed to give some medication in your vein that will act faster and be more effective. Medications that may be given include:

1. Diuretic to get rid of the excess fluid. This will make you urinate frequently.
2. Lanoxin is medication to strengthen your heart.
3. Ace inhibitors are medications to decrease the workload on your heart.

Your home medications will also be reviewed and reordered as needed.

**Smoking** - Stop Smoking! Smoking makes the symptoms of CHF much worse. Smoking cessation information will be given to you.

## **Patient Expectations**

1. To breathe easier
2. Medications will change from intravenous to oral
3. Know the signs and symptoms to call to your doctor
4. Understand your medications (names and uses)
5. Understand the importance of daily weights

## **General Information**

Once you are home, you must take the medication the doctor has ordered for you as he/she has instructed. Weighing yourself daily will show you if you are retaining fluid. There are also several other things you can do to feel better. If you smoke, stop! This will speed your recovery and lead to a longer life. Get enough rest, and take naps as needed. You can also take the following precautions: avoid irritants (smoking, dust, alcohol), obtain yearly flu immunizations, and limit outdoor activities when the weather is very hot or cold. Follow your doctor's instructions and keep your doctor's appointments.

If you have new or increased symptoms contact your doctor because this could mean your CHF is not under control.

## **Goals For Your Recovery**

- To relieve your shortness of breath
- To assure that your blood pressure, heart rate and respiratory rate are stable
- To educate you about your illness and treatment and help you prevent a relapse