



Quick Information Sheet

Congestive Heart Failure in Hospice and Palliative Patients

Congestive heart failure is a condition where the person's heart cannot pump blood the way that it should. Most often it develops over time. The usual causes of congestive heart failure are heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. It is a very common condition. Men, women, and children can have congestive heart failure.

Common signs and symptoms of congestive heart failure

- Tiredness and weakness
- Weight gain due to fluid buildup, with swelling of feet, ankles, legs or abdomen
- Trouble breathing when lying flat, shortness of breath during daily activities such as bathing, using the bathroom or dressing

- Anxiety
- Increased frequency of cough
- Decreased appetite

People with congestive heart failure can improve their quality of life by:

- Taking medications and using oxygen as ordered
- Maintaining a steady weight. Discuss with your nurse to determine the desirable weight for you. Record weight daily.

- Eating frequent, balanced, small meals; reduce salt (do not add salt to food while cooking or at the table); reduce sodium intake (read food labels to determine sodium and salt content in foods)

- Elevating legs when seated, use pillows to provide comfort
- Maintaining calm atmosphere and allowing expression of emotions
- Cautioning visitors who may be sick to visit by phone

What to report to the hospice/palliative care team

- Significant weight gain (1 to 2 pounds)
- Any change in present symptoms such as increased anxiety, shortness of breath,

increased cough, increased swelling of your abdomen, legs or feet, or pain

- If symptoms are not relieved by your present medication or treatment

Not everyone has all of the signs and symptoms. Any new problem will be evaluated by the hospice/palliative care team and new ways to manage them will be discussed.

The nurse can provide additional information about this disease. Report symptoms to the nurse so they can plan interventions for patients care.

You can find other HPNA Patient Teaching Sheets at www.hpna.org

References

Fahlberg B, Panke J, Coyne P. ed.. *Compendium of Treatment of End Stage Non-Cancer Diagnoses. Heart Failure*. Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association; Pittsburgh, PA: 2005.

Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. *Heart Failure Fact Sheet* www.cdc.gov

National Heart Lung and Blood Institute. *Heart Failure*. www.nhlbi.nih.gov

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