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What is heart failure?

Heart failure (also known as congestive heart failure or CHF) occurs when the heart does not pump efficiently enough to distribute adequate amounts of blood to all parts of the body. The condition can vary from mild to severe. A person with mild heart failure may have few symptoms, while severe heart failure may stop a person from being able to perform even the simplest of tasks.

What causes heart failure?

Heart failure can have many causes. A weak heart muscle may make the heart unable to contract and force blood throughout the body. This is called systolic heart failure.

Diastolic heart failure may be caused by a stiff heart muscle that does not allow the heart to fill with blood.

Heart failure may also be caused by valves that do not function properly.

What are the symptoms?

Shortness of breath, swelling caused by an accumulation of fluid (edema) and fatigue are common symptoms of heart failure.

How is heart failure treated?

It is generally suggested that a heart failure patient limits salt and sodium in his/her diet. Excess amounts of these may cause fluid retention.

Moderate exercise may improve the heart's function over time, but exercising to the point of exhaustion is not recommended. Be sure to consult your doctor about an exercise program before starting one.

Medication may be given as a treatment depending upon the type of heart failure, the symptoms and the underlying cause(s) of the condition. Symptoms such as shortness of breath and swelling may improve if a fluid pill is ordered. Medications such as beta blockers may reduce the work of the heart by slowing it down. A medication such as digoxin may be given to make the heart pump harder and more effectively. Medication may be given that will lower blood pressure. Pills such as ACE inhibitors reduce hormones that contribute to the condition. Your physician will determine which medications are best for you.

If heart failure is caused or worsened by a heart

valve problem, your physician may recommend surgery to correct the valve. Implanting a pacemaker may sometimes improve heart function depending upon the cause of the condition.

How can I prevent heart failure?

Some conditions leading to heart failure are hereditary, however you may be able to lower your risk. Stop smoking and limit your alcohol intake. Regular exercise keeps your heart healthy and makes you less susceptible to heart failure. Keeping your blood pressure under control is also advisable. Eat a balanced diet low in fat and cholesterol and include lots of fruit and vegetables. Weight control is important as well.

Coronary Arteries of the Heart

