

Please note: This information was current at the time of publication. But medical information is always changing, and some information given here may be out of date. For regularly updated information on a variety of health topics, please visit familydoctor.org (<http://www.familydoctor.org>), the AAFP patient education Web site.

Information from Your Family Doctor

How to Stay Out of the Hospital if You Have Congestive Heart Failure

Am Fam Physician. 2001 Apr 15;63(8):1600.

I have congestive heart failure. What is it?

Your heart has lost some ability to pump blood. This can cause shortness of breath, weakness and fluid retention. Congestive heart failure (CHF) is serious, but many treatments can help you feel better. If you know a lot about CHF, you have a good chance of staying out of the hospital.

What causes CHF?

The most common causes of CHF are:

- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Heart attacks
- Too much alcohol
- Viral infection of the heart

What can I do to help my CHF?

Salt and salty foods (like canned vegetables or soups, chips and pizza) in your diet can cause your body to retain water. Talk to your doctor about salt substitutes because they contain potassium and may not be a good idea for you to take. This will depend on your kidney function and what drugs you are taking. Some people need extra potassium but other people don't.

Although drinking a small amount of alcohol (one drink a day) seems to be helpful in some people with heart disease, drinking too much may cause heart failure and interfere with medicines. Ask your doctor if it's safe for you.

Keep your blood pressure well controlled. High blood pressure strains your heart. The strain can further weaken it.

You'll be healthier if you exercise. Ask your doctor to recommend an exercise program for you.

Talk to your doctor before you take any medicine. Standard arthritis medicines like naproxen (brand name: Naprosyn) and ibuprofen (brand name: Advil) can cause fluid retention.

When should I call my doctor?

Talk to your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Shortness of breath that gets worse
- A gain of more than 5 pounds in one week
- Leg swelling that is new for you

- Coughing or wheezing in the night, or needing to sleep propped up or sitting up
- Chest pain or a heavy feeling in your chest
- Side effects from the medicine
- Failure to lose weight even though you take more water pills

Where can I get more information?

Check these Web sites:

http://health.yahoo.com/health/Diseases_and_Conditions/Disease_Feed_Data/Heart_Failure
(http://health.yahoo.com/health/Diseases_and_Conditions/Disease_Feed_Data/Heart_Failure)
<http://www.americanheart.org/chf> (<http://www.americanheart.org/chf>)

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org> (<http://www.familydoctor.org>).

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject.

Copyright © 2001 by the American Academy of Family Physicians.

This content is owned by the AAFP. A person viewing it online may make one printout of the material and may use that printout only for his or her personal, non-commercial reference. This material may not otherwise be downloaded, copied, printed, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any medium, whether now known or later invented, except as authorized in writing by the AAFP. Contact afpserv@aafp.org (<mailto:afpserv@aafp.org>) for copyright questions and/or permission requests.

Want to use this article elsewhere? Get Permissions

(<http://www.aafp.org/journals/afp/permissions/requests.html>)

How to Stay Out of the Hospital if You Have Congestive Heart Failure - American Family Physician
<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2001/0415/p1600.html>

Copyright © 2014 American Academy of Family Physicians. All rights reserved.
11400 Tomahawk Creek Parkway • Leawood, KS 66211-2680
800.274.2237 • 913.906.6000 • Fax: 913.906.6075 • contactcenter@aafp.org

