

Cardiac CareConnections Program: Living with Heart Failure

Heart failure usually develops over time. The heart muscle becomes unable to beat as effectively as it should. Medications and dietary measures can't "fix" heart failure but can greatly increase quality of life.

Common Symptoms of Heart Failure Include:

- Shortness of breath
- Persistent cough
- Weight gain (from retained fluid)
- Swelling, usually in your feet, ankles, legs or hands
- Fatigue
- Nausea and decreased appetite
- Chest pain

How Can I Reduce These Symptoms?

Shortness of Breath:

- Sit upright or elevate your head and shoulders.
- Reduce anxiety: Distraction, guided imagery.
- Place fan in front of face for cool air.

Swelling:

- Elevate the swollen extremities, be very careful to limit your salt intake and take your medications as ordered. Ask your RN about compression stockings. Wear loose clothing.

Chest Pain:

- Rest. Use your supplemental oxygen. Take nitroglycerin as ordered. Tell your RN if you need to use medications more frequently.

Fatigue:

- Remain as active as possible, but don't "over-do." Be careful to pace yourself to avoid exhaustion.
- Avoid dust, humidity and sick people – you have less reserves when you have congestive heart failure; a simple cold can be a big deal.
- Getting rest is important. If you are having difficulty sleeping, avoid caffeine, eliminate, or reduce alcohol intake and get regular physical activity. Having a routine also helps to establish a regular sleep schedule.
- If you have sleep apnea, use your CPAP as ordered. Sleep apnea can result in high blood pressure and an irregular heart rhythm – both of these conditions can worsen heart failure.

Call Empath Health with any questions (888) 855-2838:

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