

## **QUICK INFORMATION SHEET**

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### **Congestive Heart Failure in Hospice and Palliative Patients**

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Congestive heart failure is a condition in which the heart cannot pump blood the way that it should. The weakened heart cannot supply the body with oxygen. Heart failure usually develops slowly, often over years, as the heart gradually loses its pumping ability and works less efficiently. As heart failure progresses, fluid may build up in the lungs and other parts of the body, such as legs, ankles, feet, or abdomen. The usual causes of congestive heart failure are heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Men, women, and children can have congestive heart failure. Heart failure may cause fatigue, swelling of the legs and feet, and shortness of breath. Everyday activities such as walking or climbing stairs can become very difficult.

#### **Common signs and symptoms of congestive heart failure**

- Tiredness, weakness, lack of energy
- 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, coughing
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Increased frequency of cough or wheezing
- Decreased appetite, nausea, may be due to fluid buildup in the abdomen
- Confusion or memory loss – family members may notice it
- Decreased urine output

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

- Taking medications and using oxygen as ordered. Do not stop taking a medication or change the amount. Making changes in your medicines can be dangerous. Talk with your nurse or physician about your medicines.
- 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 check sodium/salt content in foods)
- Elevating legs when seated, use pillows to provide comfort
- Maintaining a calm environment. Having a support system, people you can talk with
- Getting flu and pneumonia vaccines regularly
- Avoiding visitors and other people who are sick. Visiting by phone

## What to report to the hospice/palliative care team

- Sudden weight gain (1 to 2 pounds in a short time frame – in less than a few days)
- Any changes in condition
- Symptoms not relieved by your present medication or treatment

Not everyone has all of the signs and symptoms and the signs and symptoms can overlap with other conditions. It is important to work closely with the hospice/palliative care team who will evaluate you and discuss new ways to manage your symptoms. The nurse can provide additional information about this disease. Report any changes in condition to the healthcare team.

**Other HPNA Teaching Sheets are available at [www.HPNA.org](http://www.HPNA.org)**

## Reference

American Heart Association (AHA) Website. *About Heart Failure*. 2012. Available at [http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartFailure/AboutHeartFailure/About-Heart-Failure\\_UCM\\_002044\\_Article.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/HeartFailure/AboutHeartFailure/About-Heart-Failure_UCM_002044_Article.jsp). Accessed September 18, 2012.

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