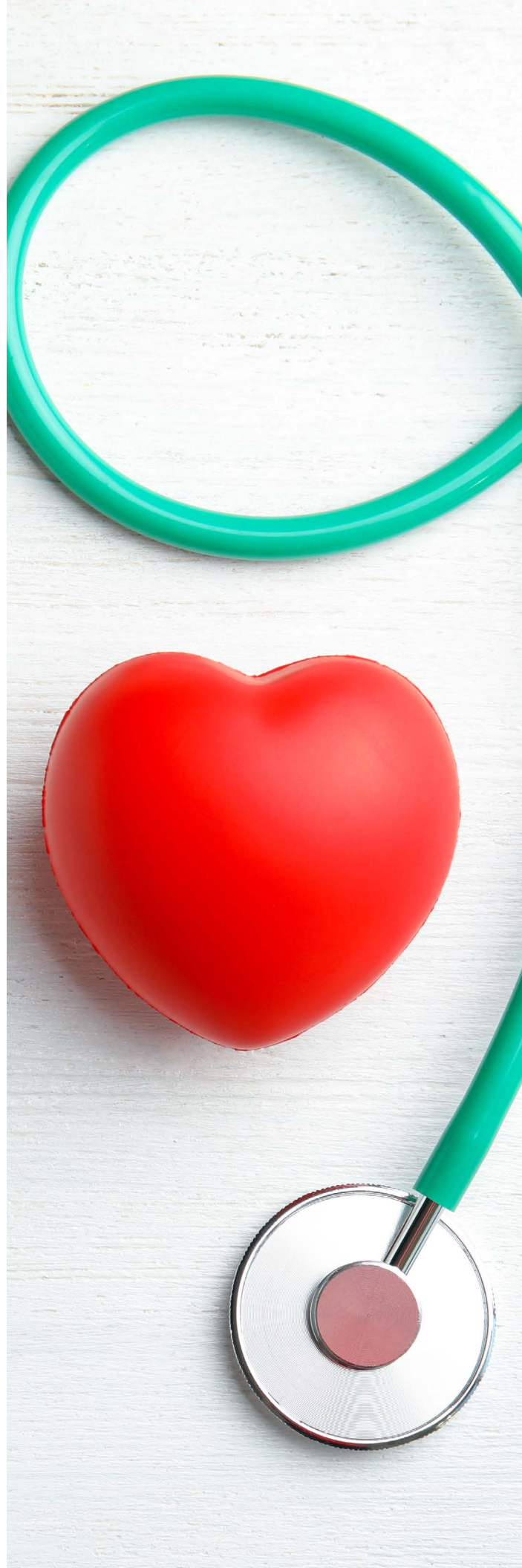


CARING FOR SENIORS WITH CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE



Congestive heart failure (CHF) affects approximately 5 million Americans and is responsible for over 11 million doctor's visits each year. The widespread diagnosis can cause fear for both seniors and their family members. However, this heart condition can be managed through proper treatment and lifestyle changes. Often, family members or professional caregivers are key to helping seniors manage their CHF symptoms.

In this resource, we review how CHF affects the body, CHF treatment, and tips to care for seniors with CHF to help family members and professional caregivers alike learn more about this serious condition.





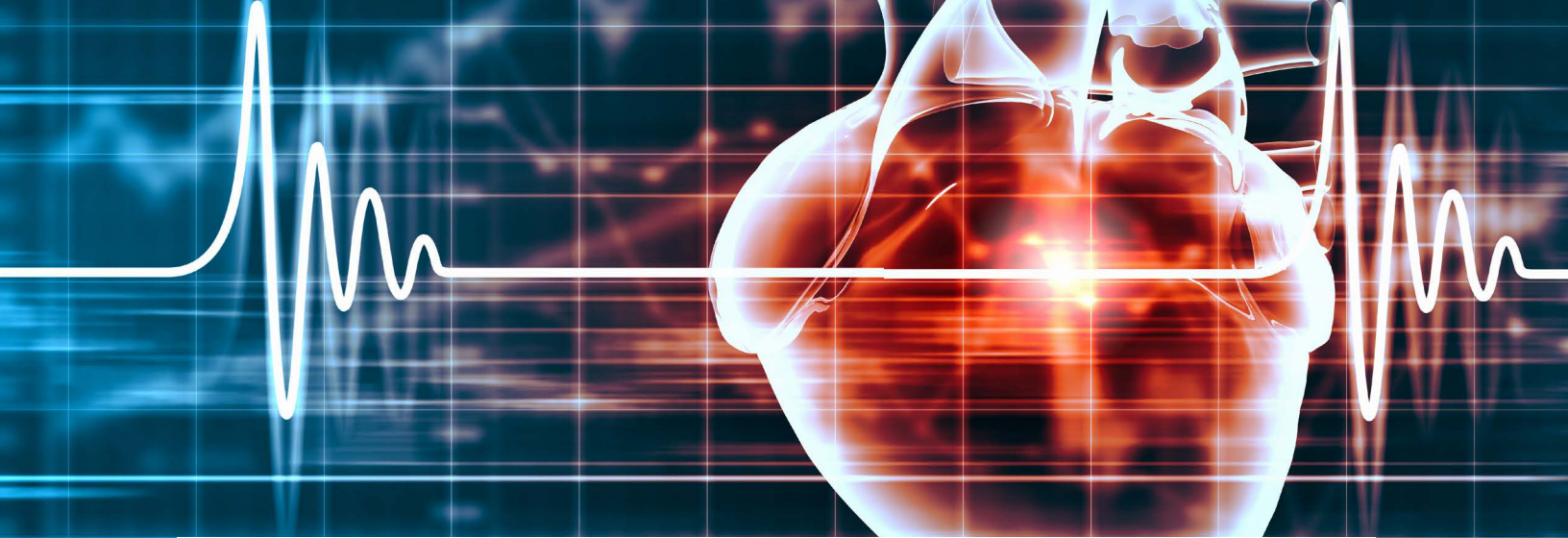
Overview of CHF

CHF is a serious form of heart failure (HF). Despite the name, CHF does not indicate that the heart is in fact failing. Instead, the condition refers to the weakening of the heart's ability to pump effectively.

When the heart pumps, the right side pumps blood to the lungs to become oxygenated, and the left side pumps the oxygenated blood to the rest of the body. During CHF, the left side of the heart can no longer pump adequate amounts of blood from the heart to the rest of the body.

Without enough force in the heart to propel blood forward, blood may get backed up in the blood vessels around the lungs, causing fluid leaks within the lungs. This buildup, or fluid congestion, is where congestive comes from in the term CHF.

Because the heart isn't able to pump enough oxygenated blood into the body, CHF may lead to organ damage if not treated properly. Over time organs may even fail, making it important for seniors to seek treatment.



Risk Factors

Some seniors are at a higher risk to develop CHF than others. Below are some of the risk factors that may indicate that a senior is more likely to develop the condition.

- High blood pressure
- Irregular heart beat
- Lung disease
- Diabetes
- Heart attack or other heart conditions
- Excess salt intake
- Excess alcohol
- Infection
- Genetics
- Thyroid disorders



CHF Symptoms

As the fluid builds around the lungs, seniors may experience the following symptoms:

- Weakness
- Shortness of breath
- Swollen hands or feet (edema)
- Exhaustion
- Unexplained weight gain
- Cough

While these symptoms may also be associated with other health conditions or signs of aging, seniors should still seek a diagnosis to receive proper treatment.

A doctor may request an electrocardiogram (EKG, ECG) to measure the effectiveness of the heart along with a chest x-ray to determine if there is any fluid build up in the lungs. These tests can help a doctor diagnose CHF. Doctors may also request blood tests, an echocardiography, or an ultrasound of the heart.

A stethoscope with a blue handle and a silver chest piece is positioned diagonally across the upper left portion of the image. Below it, a bright red, three-dimensional heart is placed on the same blue fabric background. The background is a textured blue fabric, possibly a medical uniform, with visible stitching lines.

Treating CHF

CHF can be treated with a combination of medical attention and lifestyle changes. Let's first explore some of the medical treatments available for CHF today.



Medical Treatment

A senior's physician may prescribe various medications to help manage CHF. These medications may help relieve some of the demands on the heart while also providing oxygen and nutrients to your organs.

Anticoagulants: This class of medication refers to as blood thinners that help prevent clots. When the heart is weak, clots can be more common, and anticoagulants help avoid the chance that a clot developing.

Beta blockers: Beta blockers help slow the heart rate and decrease the strength of contractions, taking some of the workload off of the organ.

Statins: Statins help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol levels and may even boost HDL (good) cholesterol levels and triglycerides.

Diuretics: These types of medications help the body excrete excess water, which helps the heart avoid getting overloaded and letting blood get into the lungs. Diuretics also help reduce symptoms of swelling.

Vasodilators: Vasodilators help the body reduce the amount of oxygen needed by the heart. They also dilate arteries to boost the amount of oxygen that reach the muscles.



Lifestyle Changes

Lifestyle changes can also help seniors manage CHF and its symptoms. These changes may also help keep the heart condition from progressing.

Exercise: Exercise is important to seniors with CHF because it can help with heart capacity and managing weight. Being overweight can cause the heart muscle to work harder. However, seniors need to be careful not to overdo it.

Diet: Seniors with CHF may need to make dietary adjustments to ensure that their body is getting proper nutrients. Additionally, seniors should avoid excess salt intake, which leads to fluid retention in the body. Professional caregivers can assist by preparing heart-healthy meals.

Smoking: Seniors should quit smoking because it further decreases the body's ability to carry oxygen to the organs. Seniors should also avoid other tobacco products.

Vaccinations: Individuals with CHF may be at a higher risk for health complications. It's important for seniors to stay current on their vaccinations and to maintain good hygiene habits.



Caring for Seniors with CHF

Family members and caregivers can help care for seniors with CHF. Here are some ways they can help seniors manage their symptoms.

Provide transportation. Family members and caregivers can provide transportation to and from doctor's appointments, pharmacy, or other appointments. By providing rides, you can help ensure that seniors are getting to their appointments. Plus, you can accompany seniors to their doctor's appointment and get the most current information about their condition.

Prepare healthy meals. Seniors may need assistance in making the needed adjustments to their diet. Family members and caregivers can help prepare meals that are heart healthy. You can assist with grocery shopping and meal planning as well. Meals can be prepared in advance or with a senior.

Oversee medication schedule: With a combination of medications to take, seniors with CHF may easily get labels confused or times mixed up. Loved ones and family members can provide medications reminders to help seniors take the correct medications at the right time and in the proper dosage.

Companionship. Seniors may not feel motivated to exercise, especially because they may easily feel out of breath. Having an exercise buddy can help seniors feel motivated to exercise. Additionally, a workout companion can help keep seniors from overdoing it.



How Caring Senior Service Can Help

Caring Senior Service provides a CHF-specific care program to help care for seniors diagnosed with CHF. Our care program includes specific training for caregivers to help them understand the common symptoms and risks associated with CHF. Additionally, we train our caregivers on how to assist with mobility, personal care, and proper diet. This program can provide peace of mind to both seniors and their family members. Learn more about how our caregivers can help seniors with CHF.

Resources

<https://www.acls.net/guide-to-congestive-heart-failure.htm>

<https://www.owensborohealth.org/app/files/public/1406/pdf-chf-patient-education-book.pdf>

https://www.medicinenet.com/congestive_heart_failure_chf_overview/article.htm



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