



## Information for patients and families about Heart Failure

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### What is heart failure?

Heart failure does not mean your heart has stopped working.

Heart failure is a condition in which:

- the muscles of your heart have become weak
- your heart needs to work harder to keep blood flowing through your body

Heart failure may also be called “congestive heart failure”.

### What are the symptoms of heart failure?

There are many symptoms of heart failure, such as:

- coughing more often
- gaining or losing weight - more than 1 kilogram (2 pounds) in a day or 2 to 3 kilograms (5 pounds) in a week
- more swelling in your feet, legs or stomach
- little or no appetite
- stomach feels bloated or full
- feeling feel sick to your stomach (nausea) throwing up (vomit)
- feeling tired
- feeling dizzy, lightheaded or sweaty
- feeling restless or confused

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## **How is heart failure treated?**

Heart failure can usually be treated in a Long Term Care Home. The doctor can prescribe a medication called a diuretic to treat your heart failure. This medication helps remove the extra fluid that builds up in your lungs and body when your heart is not pumping well.

## **What can I do to care for myself?**

- Keep track of your symptoms. Weigh yourself each morning and write down your weight.
- Do not drink more than 2 litres (8 cups) of fluids a day, unless your health care team tells you otherwise.
- Do not add salt to your food at the table.
- Do not have food or drinks that contain a lot of salt. Ask your nurse which foods and drinks you should avoid.
- Do not drink wine, beer, liquor or drinks that contain alcohol.
- Get a flu shot each year.
- If you smoke, think about how your health would benefit from quitting. Your nurse can give you more information about how to quit.

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## **When should I call the nurse?**

### **Tell your nurse if you have any of these problems:**

- your symptoms of heart failure get worse
- you gain or lose more than 1 kilogram (2 pounds) in 1 day
- you have increased shortness of breath or you begin to feel short of breath while resting
- your breathing becomes so hard that you have trouble sleeping
- you need to sleep sitting up or on more pillows than usual
- you cough up frothy or pink sputum
- you feel faint
- you have a fast or irregular heart beat or a “racing heart” that makes you feel dizzy

## **What if my condition gets worse?**

If your health gets worse, you may need hospital care. Your Health Care Team will decide if you will go to the hospital. This decision is made after talking with you and your family, and reviewing your wishes called Advanced Directives.

**For more information, visit the Heart and Stroke Foundation’s website: [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)**

**You can also talk to the visiting Nurse Practitioner.  
Call 905-529-1613 ext. 227**