

Nurses Corner: February 19, 2021

This week is heart failure awareness week. Heart failure, also known as congestive heart failure or CHF, is a chronic heart condition in which the heart does not pump as well as it should. If your heart does not pump well, then your body does not get enough blood and oxygen. Heart failure can occur if the heart cannot pump or fill correctly. Coronary artery disease (narrow blood vessels in your heart) and high blood pressure can make your heart muscles stiff and weak, so it cannot pump efficiently.

Because the body is not getting enough oxygen, heart failure causes shortness of breath, fatigue, and difficulty doing everyday tasks. When the blood does not pump out of the heart properly, it can back up into the lungs and cause fluid in the lungs, which can lead to coughing and difficulty lying flat. The body tries to keep blood going to the vital organs, so the muscles in your arms and legs may feel weaker due to less blood flow. Similarly, you can feel nauseated or a loss of appetite because your digestive organs are not getting enough blood flow to work properly. Finally, you can develop swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, and abdomen due to fluid backing up and the kidneys not functioning properly.

If you have heart failure, it is important to monitor your weight daily. Check in with your provider if you have a weight gain of more than 2 or 3 pounds in 24 hours or 5 pounds in a week. Also take notice of any swelling, especially in your lower extremities.

Things you can do to slow the progression of heart failure are to quit smoking, lose weight, track your daily fluid intake, limit alcohol, and eat a heart healthy diet rich in vegetables and fruit, low in salt, fats, sweets, and red meats. In addition, you should stay physically active, monitor your blood pressure, get enough rest, and avoid the flu and pneumonia with vaccinations. And, as always, take your medications as prescribed. If unable to take your medications for any reason, consult with your provider.