



# Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)

## What is congestive heart failure?

Congestive heart failure (CHF) is also known as heart failure. It occurs when the heart muscle is tired, weakened or overworked. It is hard for the heart to pump enough blood to the body.

## What causes CHF?

Children with heart defects are at risk for CHF because their hearts have to work harder than a heart that is typically formed .

Congestive heart failure can happen when:

- The heart pumps too much blood to the lungs, as in children with “holes” in their heart.
- The heart pumps blood against a lot of force. This can happen in children with a narrow or small aorta, pulmonary artery or aortic/pulmonary valves.
- The heart has only one ventricle, and that ventricle has to do the work normally done by two ventricles.
- The heart muscle is enlarged or weakened..This is called *cardiomyopathy*.

## What are the main symptoms of CHF?

- Abnormal tiredness
- Trouble breathing (shortness of breath) with exercise or at rest in some cases
- Water retention (puffiness) in the eyelids, hands or feet
- Rapid weight gain, mostly from water
- Arms, hands, legs and feet feel cool when resting
- Poor feeding, especially in infants

## What are the signs in an infant?

- Takes longer and longer to feed
- Amount taken in a feeding decreases over time
- Gets out of breath while trying to feed or needs to take a lot of breaks to catch their breath when feeding
- Fast and shallow breathing
- Breathing is labored and the baby may use extra muscles to help breathe
- Less than 5 wet diapers a day (normal is 6 to 8)
- Stops gaining weight but keeps growing in length

### To Learn More

- Children's Heart Center  
206-987-2015
- After hours and on weekends (hospital operator)  
206-987-2000
- Your child's healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers:  
206-987-2280 (TTY).

### What are the signs in a toddler or school-age child?

- Complains they can't breathe well
- Takes more naps and is less active than other kids
- Acts irritable or fussy
- Has puffy eyes, hands or feet
- Stops gaining weight but keeps growing in height

### What are the signs in a teenager?

- Trouble breathing and shortness of breath, especially with physical activities
- Tires easily with physical activities
- Has puffy ankles or feet
- Arms, hands, legs and feet feel cool

### How is CHF treated?

CHF is treated with medicines and sometimes children are placed on fluid restriction. The most common medicines are:

- *Diuretics* (also called water pills) to get rid of extra water (most common example is furosemide, also known as Lasix)
- *ACE inhibitors* to make the heart pump more efficiently (such as captopril or enalapril)
- *Digoxin* (Lanoxin) to help the heart beat stronger

### What else should I know about CHF medicine?

The amount of medicine used to treat CHF is based on your child's weight. That means your child will outgrow their dose of medicine and need more as they grow and develop. Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns about your child's dose.

### When do I need to call my doctor or nurse?

- If your child shows any of the signs or symptoms of CHF
- If you have questions about your child's medicines or heart condition

### Remember:

- **Bring a list of your child's medicines to each clinic appointment.**
- **Keep all medicines out of the reach of children.**

---

Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

© 1998, 2003, 2008, 2010, 2011 Seattle Children's, Seattle, Washington. All rights reserved.