



## Heart Health facts to know

### **The Heart: An Amazing “Machine”**

Your heart is a muscle, and it's the hardest working muscle in your body. If you're like most people, your heart will beat 100,000 times a day, 36.5 million times a year, and 2.5 billion times in a lifetime. Each time your heart beats, it pumps “old blood in from your veins to pick up oxygen. Then, it pumps this “new” blood back out your arteries into your body. You have about 5 liters of blood which gets pumped around and around – into the body where it gives oxygen and nutrition to cells – and then back to the heart to pick up a fresh supply of oxygen. Every cell in your body gets fresh oxygen every 60 seconds. Isn't it amazing that a muscle the size of your fist can be such a pumping machine!

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**Heart Attacks** occur when the blood flow to a part of the heart is blocked, often by a blood clot. If this clot cuts off the blood flow completely, the part of the heart muscle supplied by that artery begins to die. Get help fast if you feel any of these warning signs of heart attack:

- ◆ Uncomfortable heavy feeling, pressure, pain or squeezing in the center of your chest that lasts more than a few minutes.
- ◆ Pain that goes to your shoulders, neck, jaw or arms.
- ◆ Discomfort in your chest along with a light head, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

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### **Understanding Congestive Heart Failure**

#### **What is Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)?**

CHF is a condition in which the pumping action of the heart is weak. This means that the heart is trying, but it just can't push blood quickly enough throughout the body. As a result, the body doesn't get the oxygen and nutrition it needs to function. Without enough oxygen in their bodies, people with CHF often get tired very easily. Their hearts are *failing*.

### **What does “congestive” mean?**

Heart failure is *congestive* when blood backs up instead of flowing forward. (Imagine watching four lanes of cars trying to drive into a two-lane tunnel. Traffic will certainly back up and be congested!) When the heart is weakened by age or damaged by illness, it doesn't pump as efficiently. It has a hard time keeping the blood pumping forward. Often, some of the blood “backs up” into the lungs and other tissues, causing fluid to build up. Congestion and edema develop.

### **How can people still be alive if they have “heart failure”?**

Someone with respiratory failure has stopped breathing and will die within minutes without medical attention, right? But, heart failure is usually a *slow*, gradual process. Some people live for many years with heart failure.

### **What causes CHF?**

- Scar tissue from a heart attack
- Hardening of the arteries
- High blood pressure
- Diseases of the heart valves (usually from rheumatic fever)
- Birth defects
- Diseases of the heart muscle
- Old age

### ***Lifestyle choices that increase the risk for CHF:***

- Smoking
- Eating a high fat diet
- Being overweight
- Having diabetes and not controlling it
- Having high blood pressure and not controlling it

### **Symptoms:**

- Shortness of breath
- Coughing and you may even cough up mucus and/or pink or bloody sputum
- Getting tired very easily
- Edema or swelling, especially in your legs and feet

### **Treatments for CHF include:**

Eat low salt diet

Limit alcohol

Control blood pressure

Stop smoking

Get exercise

Control weight

Take diuretics

Take heart meds

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