

# Heart Failure Treatment

- ♥ Some infants and children require hospitalization.
- ♥ Many children require a special feeding plan.
- ♥ Medications are also used:
  - ♥ Diuretic medications may be needed to help get rid of extra fluid.
  - ♥ Digoxin is a medication that can strengthen the heart's contraction, or squeeze.
  - ♥ Blood pressure medicines can also be used to ease the work of the heart.
- ♥ If needed, surgery may correct or reduce the problem.



# Congestive Heart Failure

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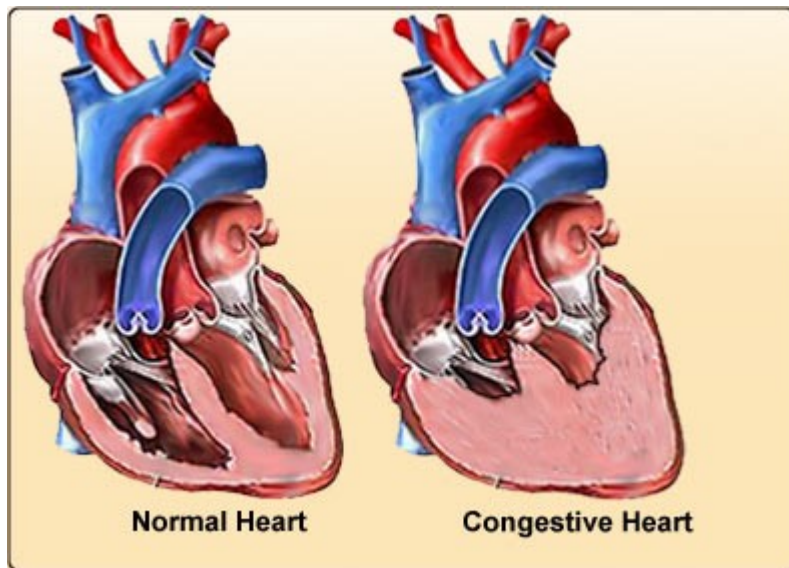


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## What is Congestive Heart Failure?

Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) is a problem that results when your child's heart cannot pump blood efficiently to the body for normal function and activity. This causes the heart muscles to work harder than normal. Fluid can then build up in the lungs and body tissues, causing swelling.

Congestive Heart Failure does not mean your child's heart will stop. In fact, congestion occurs slowly over days or even weeks. The problem can vary from mild to severe. It can usually be managed with medicines. Sometimes surgery is needed to treat the problem.



## How can we prepare for the visit to the doctors?

You can prepare by having the following information ready for your doctor:

- ♥ Any symptoms your child may have related to his or her heart problem
- ♥ Activity level (is your child more or less active than usual?)
- ♥ Feeding schedule (how often and how much does your child eat/drink/breastfeed, and does your child become tired during feeding time?)
- ♥ Medications (names and doses of many medications your child is on, including medications for other health problems)
- ♥ Any other concerns you have about your child's health
- ♥ List of questions you have for the doctor so you don't forget anything

You can prepare your child for the visit by letting them know they may have to get undressed and that the doctor may have to touch some areas of your child's body (such as the chest or groin) and that you will be there during the check up. Gowns are available for older children. The visit with the cardiologist may take from 30 minutes to a few hours depending on the number of tests needed.

## What should we do if we think our child has CHF?

CHF develops slowly, over days or even weeks. Watch your child and contact your pediatrician or family doctor if:

- ♥ There is more than one sign or symptom
- ♥ The signs don't go away with rest
- ♥ The signs reappear every time your child feeds or is active.

Even if your child shows more than one sign, it may not be CHF. It may be that your child has a simple cold but it is always important that someone check your child.

If necessary, your cardiologist will need to see your child again to assess and treat the problem.



## What causes Congestive Heart Failure?

Common causes of Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) are related to a Congenital Heart Defect (a heart defect the child is born with). Heart defects that can cause CHF are:

Holes or connections between the left and right side of the heart. This allows too much blood to flow to the lungs.

Other abnormal structures of the heart or blood vessels that increase the work load to the heart such as

- Blockages or leaky (regurgitant) valves

- Narrowed blood vessels

- Shunts

- Abnormal heart rate or rhythm

A second less common cause of CHF are diseases that weaken the heart muscle, such as:

- Cardiomyopathy—disease of the heart muscle

- Endocarditis—infection inside the heart

- Myocarditis—infection of the heart muscle

## Signs & Symptoms

### ♥ **Breathlessness**

Especially when feeding or during exercise. Because your child's breathing may change when excited or hurt, it is important to watch for changes in breathing when your child is quiet or at rest. Watch for flaring nostrils, sucking in between the ribs and grunting sounds.

### ♥ **Poor Feeding**

This is because of lack of energy and breathlessness.

### ♥ **Sweatiness**

The heart is working very hard. Sweating is more of a worry if your child looks pale or feels clammy.

### ♥ **Tiredness**

Due to all the child's energy is being used to keep the heart working, the child may tire easily.

### ♥ **Puffiness (edema)**

This will be noticed especially around the eyes, because fluid is not being moved around the body properly.

### ♥ **Not passing very much urine**

This is because fluid is not moving around the body properly.

### ♥ **Irritability**

Your child may become irritable because they feel unwell or uncomfortable.

### ♥ **Cough that doesn't go away**

A cough that does not go away can be caused by many things. One cause can be problems in the heart. Talk to your nurse or doctor about when you should be concerned about your child's cough.

### ♥ **Little or no weight gain**

Your child may not gain weight because of lack of appetite, eating is too much effort, or the work of the heart uses more calories than your child can eat.

### ♥ **Change in skin colour**

Many children with heart problems will seem blue or pale much of the time if they have not had surgery to correct the problem. You need to be concerned only if you notice a change of color in the mouth and in the finger and toenails.

### ♥ **Listless**

This is when your child shows lack of interest in the world around him or her. Watch if your child tires sooner, sleeps longer, has less energy or is less interested in things.

If you see any of the above signs for more than a couple of feeds, contact your local doctor. It may be that your child has a simple cold but it is always important that someone checks your child.