



“Lighting the way with better patient care.”

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HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Home Health • Hospice • Palliative • Home Care

## HOSPICE PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### HEART FAILURE

#### What is Heart Failure?

Heart failure is a condition in which the heart cannot pump blood the way that it should and cannot adequately supply the body with oxygen. Heart failure usually develops slowly, often over years, as the heart gradually loses its pumping ability and work less efficiently. As heart failure progresses, fluid may build up in the lungs and other parts of the body, such as legs, ankles, feet, or abdomen. The usual causes of heart failure are heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Men, women, and children can have heart failure. Heart failure may cause fatigue, swelling of the legs and feet, and shortness of breath. Everyday activities such as walking or climbing stairs can become difficult.

#### What are the Signs and Symptoms of Heart Failure?

*The person with heart failure may have some or none of the following:*

##### Symptoms:

- Anxiety
- Pain
- Activity intolerance – tiredness, fatigue, weakness, lack of energy
- Depression
- Delirium
- Decreased sexual interest
- Increased heart rate (tachycardia)
- Decreased appetite and nausea due to fluid buildup in the abdomen
- Progressive difficulty breathing (dyspnea) when lying flat, shortness of breath during daily activities such as bathing, using the bathroom, or dressing

##### Signs:

- Weight gain due to fluid buildup, with swelling of feet, ankles, legs, or abdomen
- Ascites (abdominal swelling)
- Increased frequency of a cough or wheezing
- Coughing up pink, foamy mucus
- Confusion or memory loss
- Decreased urine output

#### What potential factors can cause Heart Failure?

- Damage from cardiac risk factors – hypertension, diabetes, and smoking
- Coronary artery disease and myocardial infarction
- Faulty heart valves

**Anova Health Care System**

**Tel:** (412) 681-1044 **Fax:** (412) 681-8380

**Email:** [info@anovahomehealth.com](mailto:info@anovahomehealth.com)

**Website:** [www.AnovaHomeHealth.com](http://www.AnovaHomeHealth.com)



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- Irregular heartbeats/abnormal heart rhythms
- Cardiomyopathy
- Myocarditis
- Congenital heart defects
- Poor kidney function
- Alcohol or drug use
- Viruses or infection
- Obesity
- Sleep apnea
- HIV
- Hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism
- Hemochromatosis (excess iron)
- Amyloidosis (build-up of protein in organs)

#### **What can be done for the person with Heart Failure?**

- It is helpful if the patient quits smoking and avoids consumption of alcohol and caffeine, if possible.
- Promote a calm environment to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Ensure the patient gets adequate rest and schedules activities with rest periods.
- Elevate the patient's legs when seated, use pillows to provide comfort.
- The patient should avoid visitors and other people who are sick. If visitors are sick, they should only communicate with the patient by phone or video call.
- Reduce salt intake and keep the patient on a balanced diet of frequent, small meals,
- Encourage the patient to maintain a steady weight
- Reduce the patient's anxiety by addressing questions and providing clear information.
- Provide emotional and spiritual support.
- Avoid dressing the patient in anything that could restrict blood flow, stick to loose-fitting clothing.
- Avoid extreme temperature changes.
- Make sure the patient receives flu and pneumonia vaccines regularly.

**It is essential for patients and their families to maintain open communication with the hospice and palliative care team, promptly reporting any changes in symptoms or concerns. Additionally, seeking support from heart disease-specific organizations can provide valuable resources and community connections during this challenging journey.**