



Objectives/What You Will Learn:

- **How the heart works**
- **Symptoms of heart failure**
- **The aide's role in assisting client's with heart failure**

The heart is a muscular organ about the size of a fist, located just behind and slightly left of the breastbone. The heart pumps blood through the network of arteries and veins called the cardiovascular system. The heart has four chambers:

- The right atrium receives blood from the veins and pumps it to the right ventricle.
- The right ventricle receives blood from the right atrium and pumps it to the lungs, where it is loaded with oxygen.
- The left atrium receives oxygenated blood from the lungs and pumps it to the left ventricle.
- The left ventricle (the strongest chamber) pumps oxygen-rich blood to the rest of the body. **The left ventricle's vigorous contractions create our blood pressure.**

The coronary arteries run along the surface of the heart and provide oxygen-rich blood to the heart muscle. A web of nerve tissue also runs through the heart, conducting the complex signals that govern contraction and relaxation. Surrounding the heart is a sac called the pericardium.

Sources- Web MD- Heart Failure; PHI national curriculum- PROVIDING PERSONAL CARE SERVICES TO ELDERLY AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Heart Failure Symptoms:

A person may not have any heart failure symptoms, or the symptoms may be mild to severe. Symptoms can be constant or can come and go. Heart failure symptoms are related to the changes that occur to the heart and body, and the severity depends on how weak the heart is. The symptoms can include:

- **Congested lungs.** A weak heart causes fluid to back up in the lungs. This can cause shortness of breath with exercise or difficulty breathing at rest or when lying flat in bed. Lung congestion can also cause a dry, hacking cough or wheezing.
- **Fluid and water retention.** A weak heart pumps less blood to the kidneys and causes fluid and water retention, resulting in swollen ankles, legs, and abdomen (called edema) and weight gain. This can also cause an increased need to urinate during the night as the body attempts to get rid of this excess fluid. Bloating in your stomach may cause a loss of appetite or nausea.
- **Dizziness, fatigue, and weakness.** Less blood to the major organs and muscles makes a person feel tired and weak. Less blood to the brain can cause dizziness or confusion.
- **Rapid or irregular heartbeats.** The heart beats faster to pump enough blood to the body. This can cause a fast or irregular heartbeat.

The heart is the strongest muscle in the body. It pumps blood to the lungs to get oxygen. Then it pumps blood around the body.



Remember * A client with heart failure may need more time to complete tasks and may need to rest between tasks, such as between bathing and dressing. Being tired and weak are common with someone with heart failure.

The Aide's role in assisting clients with heart failure:

- ♥ **Help the client work on maintaining fluid balance.** The client's doctor may ask them to keep a record of the amount of fluids they drink or eat and how often they go to the bathroom. The more fluid a person carries in their blood vessels, the harder the heart must work to pump excess fluid through the body. You can help the client keep track of how much fluid they are taking in and how much they go to the bathroom. The client's plan of care may have listed as a task for you to measure your client's fluid intake and measure your client's urine.
- ♥ **Help the client with limiting how much salt (sodium) they eat.** The client may be on a special low salt (low sodium) diet. Remember salt can be hidden in canned foods and fast food, salt is not just in the salt shaker! Be sure to know if your client is on a low sodium diet and learn about how to read labels on foods and learn which foods to avoid when providing meal preparation as part of the client's plan of care.
- ♥ **Help the client monitor their weight and lose weight if needed.** Client's should weigh at the same time each day, preferably in the morning, in similar clothing, after urinating but before eating, and on the same scale. You can help the client by reminding them to weigh or helping them to weigh and recording their weight as assigned on the plan of care. Be sure to know what to report and who to report to if your client has a weight gain beyond the parameters set. (Example- gaining 2 pounds in one day or 5 pounds in one week). The client may need a medication adjustment or some other treatment so it is important to report these findings to your supervisor right away.
- ♥ **Help the client monitor their symptoms.** Follow the plan of care and report to your supervisor if you notice any new symptoms that occur with your client such as increased swelling in legs, feet or abdomen, increase shortness of breath or fatigue or if you notice other symptoms worsen. Report any new or worsening symptoms that your client is having right away, if reported early, it may help your client to get the treatment they need and avoid an emergency room visit.
- ♥ **Understand your role in assisting the client in taking their medications as prescribed.** Drugs are used to improve the heart's ability to pump blood, decrease stress on the heart, decrease the progression of heart failure, and prevent fluid retention. Many heart failure drugs are used to decrease the release of harmful hormones. These drugs will cause the blood vessels to dilate or relax (thereby lowering blood pressure). Report if you notice the client is not taking their medication, if the client says they are not able to buy their medications because they are too expensive, or other signs that the client is not taking their prescribed medications.

**SHOUT OUT!
THANKS FOR ALL YOU DO!!**

**36th Annual
National Nursing Assistants Week
June 13-20, 2013**

**National Career Nursing Assistants Day
June 13, 2013**

This year's Theme is:

**Nursing Assistants @ the
Heart of Caring**

Congestive heart failure
happens when the heart can no
longer pump out all the blood
that comes into it.



For more information on AHHC's
endorsed risk management and
insurance program, visit:
<http://www.homeandhospicecare.org/insurance/home.html>

