What is heart failure?
Heart failure happens when your heart is too weak to pump enough blood to your body’s organs so they can function as they should. Heart failure often causes “congestion.” This means there is a buildup of fluid, most often in the lungs, legs and feet.

There are two types of heart failure:

- **Systolic heart failure** occurs when the heart muscle cannot pump with enough force to push the needed amount of blood to the body. Blood coming into the heart from the lungs may back up and cause fluid to leak into the lungs. This is called pulmonary (lung) congestion.
- **Diastolic heart failure** occurs when the heart muscle has become stiff and unable to relax. This may cause fluid to collect in the feet, ankles, legs and sometimes the lungs.

What causes heart failure?
As we age, the heart loses some of its ability to pump. However, other things can lead to serious loss of the pumping function such as:

- A heart attack that destroys a large area of heart muscle
- Weakened heart muscle due to an infection
- High blood pressure
- Serious heart valve problems
- Irregular heart beats
- Alcohol and recreational drugs
- Chemotherapy
- Congenital heart defects
Sometimes the exact cause cannot be found

**The heart may try to adjust to the heart failure by:**

- Enlarging (dilatation) which allows more blood into the heart.
- Thickening of the heart muscle (hypertrophy). This allows the heart to squeeze harder and pump more blood.
- Beating faster, which increases the amount of blood to the body.

Symptoms of heart failure vary from person to person. Some people have only one symptom and others have many. If you have questions about the seriousness of your heart condition or your plan of care, talk with your doctor.

**What are the symptoms?**

It may take time for symptoms to occur or symptoms may develop suddenly. The following symptoms may occur:

- Loss of appetite
- Sudden, unexplained weight gain
- Increased shortness of breath during everyday activities or while resting
- Trouble breathing
- Frequent, dry cough
- Awakening during the night with breathing trouble
- Tired, run-down feeling
- Swelling of legs, ankles, feet and fingers
- Sick to stomach, belly soreness, swelling and pain

**What treatments are available?**

Heart failure caused by an overworked heart can be treated by finding the cause, such as anemia, thyroid problems, a blocked artery in the heart or a heart valve problem. Heart failure caused by damage to the heart muscle cannot be cured, but treatment may be very successful. Treatment often includes:

- Eating a healthy, low-salt diet
- Not smoking or using tobacco products
- Limiting alcohol to no more than one drink per day
- Losing weight, if needed
- Regular, safe exercise
- Medications as prescribed by the doctor

**What to do about swelling:** If your rings are too tight, take them off. If you can leave a dent in your skin when you press a finger in your ankle, raise your legs. Put your feet up on a foot stool or several pillows when you are sitting in a chair.

**Home Guidelines include:**

**Low Sodium Diet**

- Eat no more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium a day. One teaspoon of salt equals 2,300 milligrams of sodium. The mineral sodium is found in salt and many other foods. It causes
your body to retain water. Extra water increases the amount of blood your heart must pump.
- A dietitian can help you learn which foods and drinks contain large amounts of sodium, which do not and how to read labels so you can choose foods low in sodium.

**Fluid Restriction**

- Limit intake of liquids and beverages. People with heart failure should limit how much liquid they drink to 48 ounces per day. No more than six 8 ounce glasses per day. Drinking extra liquids makes pumping more difficult for the heart.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages you may have to stop or have only one drink per day. One drink means a glass of beer or wine or a mixed drink or cocktail containing no more than one ounce of alcohol.

**Weigh yourself every day.**

- The best time is when you first wake up each morning after you empty your bladder.
- Call your doctor if you gain two or more pounds in one day, or you gain three to five pounds in one week.

**Quit smoking.**

The nicotine in cigarettes, cigars and chewing tobacco narrows blood vessels. It is harder for blood to flow through narrowed blood vessels. Using tobacco decreases the amount of oxygen in your blood.

**Exercise as much as your doctor says is safe for you.**

- For many people with heart failure, walking is a good exercise program. You can walk in the house or outdoors depending on the weather. Avoid being out in very hot or cold weather.
- With your doctor’s OK, take part in a cardiac rehab program.

**Take your medications on time and as written by your doctor.**

**Watch for signs that your heart failure may be getting worse. Call your doctor if you notice:**

- Increased shortness of breath
- Increased number of episodes of shortness of breath
- Heart is pounding (palpitations)
- Coughing up pink, frothy mucous
- Dry cough that does not go away in a day or two
- Feeling very tired after little or no activity
- Swelling of legs and/or belly with weight gain

**What to do if you have trouble breathing:**

- Stop what you are doing when short of breath.
- Sit or lie down and rest until you feel better.
- If you feel short of breath when lying down, place several pillows under your head.
• If short of breath after sleeping, sit up. Hang your feet over the side of the bed. You also can stand up and walk around a bit to improve blood flow. Together our goal is to help you live longer, feel better and stay out of the hospital. If you have concerns about your ability to follow your plan of care, talk with your nurse or doctor. Listen carefully for what you can do to manage your heart failure at home.

Follow-up Doctor Appointments:
It is important that you see your doctor for a check-up within seven to 10 days following discharge home from the hospital. Call your doctor to schedule this appointment if one has not already been scheduled for you.

Weight Chart

Admission Weight: _______________ Dismissal Weight: _______________

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