ST. FRANCIS 24/7 CALL CENTER: (321) 269-4240

St. Francis REFLECTIONS® Hospice
Established 1977 • Licensed 1990

Congestive Heart Failure

In CHF, the heart is weakened and cannot effectively pump blood. This leads to a buildup of fluid, particularly in the lungs, liver, abdomen, and lower extremities.

First Appearance and Common Symptoms:

Symptoms may differ from person to person

- Breathlessness
- Difficulty breathing particularly when lying down
- Rapid weight gain (fluid retention)
- Fatigue
- Persistent cough
- Swelling (edema) in legs and ankles
- Irregular heartbeats

Causes:

Potential causes:

- Hypertension, coronary artery disease, and previous heart attacks damage the heart's ability to function. Heart valve problems and chronic conditions like diabetes can also contribute.

Hospice Considerations:

CHF is a chronic, progressive disease. In hospice care, diuretics (e.g., furosemide) manage fluid retention, while beta-blockers or ACE inhibitors help regulate blood pressure and heart function.

- **Frequent Hospitalizations:** When frequent hospitalizations for heart failure exacerbations occur, and the patient's condition does not improve with treatment.
- **Refractory Symptoms:** When symptoms such as severe shortness of breath, fluid retention, and fatigue are not manageable with current treatments.
- **End-of-Life Discussions:** When discussions about end-of-life care and goals of care become a priority for the patient and family.

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Symptom Management Tips:

- **Shortness of breath:** Oxygen therapy and positioning (sitting upright) to reduce dyspnea. Morphine may be used for its vasodilator effects.
- **Swelling:** Diuretics to manage fluid overload. Limiting salt intake and fluid restriction can help prevent further swelling.
- **Fatigue:** Encourage rest and light activities. Sleep with the head elevated to reduce fluid buildup.
- **Emotional support:** Heart failure can cause anxiety and depression, requiring counseling or medications like anxiolytics.

How to Help:

- **Patient Tips:**
  - **Monitor Symptoms:** Track weight daily and report sudden changes, as they may indicate fluid retention.
  - **Diet:** Follow a low-sodium diet to reduce fluid retention and pressure on the heart.
  - **Activity:** Rest when fatigued, but try gentle movement to improve circulation and mood.
- **Caregiver Tips:**
  - **Fluid Monitoring:** Help the patient monitor fluid intake and avoid excessive fluid consumption.
  - **Breathing Support:** Assist with using prescribed breathing devices, such as CPAP or oxygen, to improve comfort.
  - **Provide Encouragement:** Encourage small but achievable tasks to promote a sense of accomplishment.

St. Francis Reflections is always available to assist with any questions or concerns 24/7

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