

The Board of Trustees of your Health & Welfare Plan entered into an agreement with R/Le & Associates, LLP, to provide plan participants Disease Management and Wellness Programs. These programs assist the Welfare Plan in accomplishing its goal of finding innovative new ways to help you and your family stay healthy. The first three Disease Management Programs targeted Diabetes, Asthma, and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

The fourth program targets Congestive Heart Failure (CHF). Nearly 5 million Americans have CHF and 550,000 new cases are diagnosed each year. This is a serious condition that has no cure. But with proper care, including medication and a healthy lifestyle, you should be able to manage the symptoms and improve your health and quality of life.

What is Congestive Heart Failure? The term "heart failure" sounds frightening - as if your heart has stopped beating. What the term really means is that your heart isn't pumping as well as it should. The heart is a powerful pump that sends blood flowing throughout the body. Blood contains the oxygen and nutrients that the body needs in order to function. When the heart is not pumping blood as strongly as it should, the body does not receive enough oxygen and nutrients to function properly. This poor pumping action by the heart is congestive heart failure.

What causes heart failure? As we age, we all lose some blood-pumping ability in our heart. But heart failure develops when the added stress of certain health conditions either damage the heart or make it work harder. Lifestyle factors - like smoking, being overweight, eating foods high in fat and cholesterol, and not exercising - not only cause heart disease and heart attacks, but also cause heart failure. One or more of the following may cause heart failure:

- **Coronary artery disease**
- **Past heart attacks**
- **High blood pressure**
- **Heart valve disease**
- **Heart muscle disease**
- **Heart defects present at birth**
- **Severe lung disease**
- **Diabetes**
- **Excessive use of alcohol or drugs**

What are the symptoms of heart failure? Depending on how weak your heart is, symptoms can range from moderate to severe. You may experience one or all of them, or possibly none of the symptoms. The number of symptoms you experience is not an indication of how weak your heart is. The heart's weakened pumping action causes body fluid (water) to back-up into the lungs, kidneys, and other parts of the body such as the arms, legs, ankles, and feet. This congestion, combined with a poor supply of oxygen, causes you to feel very tired and short of breath. Everyday activities such as walking, household chores, and climbing stairs become difficult. Symptoms of heart failure may include:

- **Shortness of breath**
- **Dry, hacking cough or wheezing**
- **Swollen ankles and legs**

- **Sudden weight gain**
- **Fatigue/low energy**
- **Mental confusion or impaired thinking**
- **A loss or change in appetite**
- **Frequent urination**
- **Rapid and irregular heartbeat**

Heart failure requires you to pay close attention to any changes in symptoms. If you notice something new, or a sudden worsening of a current symptom, notify your doctor immediately. If caught early, these symptoms may require an adjustment in medication, which often can be explained over the phone. This may decrease the chances of a trip to the emergency room. Here's what to watch for:

- **Sudden weight gain** - three or more pounds in one day, four or more pounds in one week
- **Shortness of breath while at rest** - not related to exercise or exertion
- **Increased swelling of the lower limbs** - legs or ankles
- **Swelling or pain in the abdomen**
- **Trouble sleeping** - awakening short of breath, using more pillows
- **Frequent dry, hacking cough**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Increased fatigue or feeling tired all the time**

As in all matters of health, the best approach to keep your CHF under control is to learn as much as you can about this disease.

We hope you find this information helpful. Through implementation of this program, we hope to provide you with an additional resource to improve your quality of life, and to prevent or reduce the impact of complications associated with heart failure.