

# Congestive Heart Failure

## What is it?

- Congestive heart failure is often called CHF or heart failure. It is a disease that occurs when your heart is too weak to pump blood.
- Heart failure can cause breathing problems as the blood backs up into the lungs. It can also cause fluid to back up into your legs (called edema) or belly (called ascites). This causes you to retain water and gain weight.
- Having heart failure can make you feel tired and out of breath, even when you are sitting down.
- Many people with heart failure end up in the hospital because they cannot breathe well.

## How do I stay healthy?

- Take your medications every day! One of the biggest reasons for heart problems is that people forget to take their medications.
- Cut down on salt. Salt makes your body hold in more fluid.
- Avoid canned foods, processed meats like bologna, fast foods, regular salad dressing, any “seasoning packets,” most frozen dinners and packaged crackers. Too much salt.
- Never add salt to your food when cooking or at the table.
- Read the food labels; look for foods with low sodium on the package.
- Weigh yourself every day.
- Know what your goal weight should be.
- Lose weight and exercise the way your doctor says to.
- Avoid alcohol or street drugs like cocaine. They can cause your heart to stop working.
- Avoid foods and drinks with caffeine.

## When should I call my Doctor or NurseWise?

- If you gain more than 3 pounds in one day or 5 pounds in one week (unless your doctor gave you different instructions).
- If you are having trouble breathing.
- If you notice swelling in your legs, belly (abdomen), or ankles that is getting worse.
- If your shoes do not fit.
- If you have shortness of breath at night or you need to sleep sitting up.
- If you become more tired each day.
- If you are feeling sick or not like usual.