Congestive Heart Failure (CHF)

**What is it?**

Congestive heart failure (CHF) does not mean the heart has stopped beating or that your child is about to die. It means the heart isn't pumping as well as it should and the body isn't getting enough oxygen.

**What causes congestive heart failure?**

In children, CHF generally happens when there is a congenital heart defect, such as a hole in the heart or a problem with one of the valves. When the heart doesn’t pump as well as it should, the blood flow slows down, which causes blood to back up in the veins and body organs.

**What are the signs and symptoms of CHF?**

- Rapid, labored breathing
- Tires easily
- Swelling around eyes, hands and feet.

Eating is tiring for babies with CHF. They sweat, eat less and have trouble gaining weight.

Children with CHF are short of breath even when they aren’t playing hard. They can’t keep up with their friends and the other kids in the family.

**What is the treatment for CHF?**

Children in congestive heart failure should see a cardiologist regularly. The cardiologist may prescribe medicines to help the heart work better:

- **Digoxin** (also called Lanoxin®) helps the heart pump stronger.
- **Lasix®** is a diuretic that helps the body get rid of extra fluid.
- **Captopril®** helps blood vessels relax so the heart won’t have to work as hard to pump blood into the blood vessels.

Your doctor or a nutritionist may talk to you about a special diet for your child that gives him extra calories and nutrients.

**Babies with CHF often tire of eating before they’re full. You can do several things to help your baby during feedings:**

1. Use a soft nipple so your baby doesn’t have to suck very hard.
2. Let your baby rest and burp often.
3. Feed your baby small amounts and more often.
4. Hold your baby in a semi-upright position with his head well above his stomach. This position makes swallowing and breathing easier.
Special Instructions

- Call your child's cardiologist or a cardiology nurse if your child gets worse.

**Children’s Mercy Cardiology office:**  (816) 234-3325
8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

**Emergencies (24-hour number):**  Call (816) 234-3000
Ask the operator for the cardiologist on call.

- Keep all follow-up appointments with your cardiologist. To make or change an appointment, call the Cardiology Clinic at (816) 234-3325.

- Ask your child's doctor or nurse for information about your child's medications.

- The American Heart Association has the following helpful booklets:
  - "If Your Child Has a Congenital Heart Defect"
  - "Feeding Your Infant With Congenital Heart Disease"