Heart Talk: Evaluating Patients with Heart Failure

Module 2: Evidence-based Education for Health Care Professionals
The Basics

- “How do you feel?”
- Focus on shortness of breath
- Vital signs are important
  - O2 saturation
  - Heart rate
  - Respiratory rate
  - Blood pressure
High Blood Pressure

• Patients can have high blood pressure:
  • during exacerbation of heart failure
  • with chronic hypertension
Low Blood Pressure

- Patients can have low pressure:
  - during critical illness
  - under treatment for heart failure
    - Multiple cardiac meds lower the BP
    - Low BP can be okay – less workload for heart
  - Key question: “Do you get dizzy when you stand up?”
Weight

- Probably most useful measurement in patients with heart failure
- Increase in weight can signal fluid retention
  - But can also mean healthy weight gain from good diet
- Time change is key
  - 3lbs in one day or 5lbs in one week is abnormal
  - Must weigh at same time each day in same amount of clothing!
Physical Exam

• Lungs
  • Crackles at base can mean pulmonary edema
  • Also can be due to lung disease and other non-cardiac causes
• Jugular venous pressure (JVP)
  • Can indicate fluid overload
  • Challenging to visualize in many patients
Physical Exam

Edema

- Pitting versus non-pitting
- Locates to dependent areas – ankles, sacrum, sometimes abdomen
- Graded 1+ to 4+
  - But no agreed upon definition of each grade
- Many elderly patients have venous stasis edema
  - This edema is not from heart failure
Physical Exam

- Often you will know a patient is in heart failure BEFORE the exam if you take a good history and examine the vitals, especially weight.
- Many physical signs of heart failure are present in stable, well compensated patients.
- Context and changes from one day to the next are key.
### ZONES TO MANAGE HEART FAILURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Green Zone</th>
<th>You have:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- No shortness of breath</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- No weight gain more than 3 pounds per day</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- No swelling of feet, ankles, legs or stomach</td>
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<td>- No chest pain</td>
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<td>What to do:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Keep up the good work!</td>
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<td>- Take your medicine</td>
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<td>- Eat a low salt diet</td>
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<td>- Weigh yourself every day</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yellow Zone</th>
<th>You have:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Weight gain of 3 pounds in 1 day or 5 pounds in one week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- More shortness of breath</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- More swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, or stomach</td>
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<td>- Feeling more tired</td>
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<td>- New or unusual coughing</td>
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<td>- Dizziness</td>
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<td>- Hard to breathe lying down — need to sleep sitting in chair</td>
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<td>- Call your doctor or nurse</td>
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<tr>
<th>Red Zone</th>
<th>You have:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hard time breathing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Struggling to breathe even at rest</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Chest pain or discomfort</td>
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<td>- Feeling faint</td>
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<td>What to do:</td>
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<td>- Call 911 or</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Get help, go to Emergency Room</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| GREEN ZONE | You have:  
|---|---|
|  | 🔺 No shortness of breath  
|  | 🔺 No weight gain more than 3 pounds per day  
|  | 🔺 No swelling of feet, ankles, legs or stomach  
|  | 🔺 No chest pain  
| What to do:  
|---|---|
|  | 🔺 Keep up the good work!  
|  | 🔺 Take your medicine  
|  | 🔺 Eat a low salt diet  
|  | 🔺 Weigh yourself every day |
| **YELLOW ZONE** | **You have:**  
- Weight gain of 3 pounds in 1 day or 5 pounds in one week  
- More shortness of breath  
- More swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, or stomach  
- Feeling more tired  
- New or unusual coughing  
- Dizziness  
- Hard to breathe lying down – need to sleep sitting in chair | **What to do:**  
- Call your doctor or nurse |
You have:
- Hard time breathing
- Struggling to breathe even at rest
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Feeling faint

What to do:
- Call 911 or
- Get help, go to Emergency Room
Patient Example #1

- Mr. L reports more shortness of breath when ambulating to the bathroom for the past two days. He has also noticed leg swelling. His weight is up 5 lbs in the past 2 days.
- Vitals: BP 150/85, P 90, RR 18, O2 95%RA
- Exam: Rales, ↑JVP, Edema
You have:
- Weight gain of 3 pounds in 1 day or 5 pounds in one week
- More shortness of breath
- More swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, or stomach
- Feeling more tired
- New or unusual coughing
- Dizziness
- Hard to breathe lying down – need to sleep sitting in chair

What to do:
- Call your doctor or nurse
Mrs. S has dementia. She ambulates only with assistance. The past two days she has been more lethargic. She has no complaints. Her weight is up 5lbs in 2 days.

Vitals: BP 142/85, P 88, RR 20, O2 95%RA

Exam: Rales, ↑JVP, Edema
You have:
- Weight gain of 3 pounds in 1 day or 5 pounds in one week
- More shortness of breath
- More swelling in your feet, ankles, legs, or stomach
- Feeling more tired
- New or unusual coughing
- Dizziness
- Hard to breathe lying down – need to sleep sitting in chair

What to do:
- Call your doctor or nurse
Patient Example #3

- Mr. P can ambulate to the commode with his cane. He has been home from the hospital for a week and is eating better the past few days. He has no complaints. His weight is up 3lbs over the past week.
- Vitals: BP 136/85, P 72, RR 14, O2 96%RA
- Exam: Fine Rales, can’t see JVP, no Edema
**GREEN ZONE**

You have:
- No shortness of breath
- No weight gain more than 3 pounds per day
- No swelling of feet, ankles, legs or stomach
- No chest pain

What to do:
- Keep up the good work!
- Take your medicine
- Eat a low salt diet
- Weigh yourself every day
Patient Example #4

- Mr. D has dementia. For the past two days he has been coughing. He is lethargic and does not want to get out of bed. He has a low grade temperature. His weight is up 6 lbs over the past day.
- Vitals: BP 160/95, P 104, RR 24, O2 88% RA
- Exam: Rales ½ up, can’t see JVP, no Edema
You have:
- Hard time breathing
- Struggling to breathe even at rest
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Feeling faint

What to do:
- Call 911 or
- Get help, go to Emergency Room
Summary

- Weight and symptoms are very helpful in establishing patients’ clinical status.
- Zones are a simple and straightforward method to understanding heart failure.
For information on the Heart Talk videos, please visit us on our website: www.qualidigm.org or email us at: HeartTalk@qualidigm.org
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