

# Medicare Risk Adjustment Coding Focus

## Congestive heart failure

Heart failure is a serious medical condition that occurs when the heart is no longer able to adequately pump blood. The body depends on the heart to pump blood throughout, carrying oxygen and nutrients to all the organs. In patients with heart failure, the heart muscle becomes damaged or weakened and it cannot sufficiently meet the body's needs for blood and oxygen.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), about 6.5 million adults in the United States have heart failure. Approximately half of those who develop heart failure die within five years of the initial diagnosis.<sup>1</sup>

### Congestive heart failure

In CHF, the blood that flows out from the heart is slowed, which causes the blood that is returning to the heart to become backed up in the veins, creating congestion within the body's tissues. This congestion can produce swelling, known as edema, which is usually found in the ankles and legs. Excess fluid can also accumulate in other areas, such as the lungs, making it difficult to breathe and increasing the risk of respiratory distress.<sup>2</sup>

### Symptoms

There are a variety of symptoms that a person with heart failure may have, which include:

- Feeling weak or tired.
- Shortness of breath from daily activities.
- Chronic coughing or wheezing.
- Weight gain and swelling in the legs, ankles and feet or stomach.

### Risk factors

There are multiple factors that can lead to CHF. It is more likely to occur in persons over the age of 65. Having certain medical conditions such as diabetes, coronary artery disease, a previous heart attack, and high blood pressure can also increase the risk. Certain behaviors may also be contributing factors, such as smoking tobacco, eating a diet high in cholesterol, fat and sodium, not getting enough exercise, and obesity.

### Treatment

While heart failure is a long-term (chronic) and mostly irreversible condition, there are a variety of treatments available to help manage symptoms. Medications like diuretics or blood vessel dilators may be prescribed as well as lifestyle changes that include a reduced-sodium diet, increased exercise, and smoking cessation. Additionally, there are surgical options, such as angioplasty or coronary artery bypass when coronary disease is the underlying cause. In the most severe cases, a heart transplant may be the only effective treatment option.<sup>3</sup>

### Coding guidance

Per the AHA Coding Clinic, 2014, First Quarter, "coders cannot assume either diastolic or systolic failure or a combination of both." ICD-10-CM contains specific codes for systolic, diastolic and combined congestive heart failure with additional detail to indicate acuity (acute, chronic, acute on chronic).<sup>4</sup> Providers must document the specific type and acuity in order to code to the highest degree of specificity.

Heart failure	
I50.1	Left ventricular failure, unspecified
I50.2	*Systolic (congestive) heart failure
I50.3	*Diastolic (congestive) heart failure
I50.4	*Combined systolic (congestive) and diastolic (congestive) heart failure
I50.8	*Other heart failure
I50.9	Heart failure, unspecified
* Requires additional characters	

### Resources

- 1 Centers for Disease Control: *Heart Failure Fact Sheet* (accessed July 2020): <https://www.cdc.gov>
- 2 U.S. National Library of Medicine: *Heart Failure* (accessed July 2020): <https://medlineplus.gov>.
- 3 American Heart Association: *Treatment Options for Heart Failure* (accessed August 2020): <https://www.heart.org>
- 4 Optum360° (2019) *ICD-10-CM Expert for Physicians*, The complete official code set.

Reference the ICD-10-CM Codebook, CMS-HCC Risk Adjustment Model(s) and AHA Coding Clinic for complete code sets and official coding guidance.