

Heart Failure: Left & Right

Nursing

Which side fails decides where the fluid backs up, and so what you assess.

Left-sided — lungs

- Breathlessness, worse lying flat
- Waking at night breathless
- Crackles that do not clear with coughing
- Cough, sometimes frothy or pink sputum
- Fatigue and poor exercise tolerance

Right-sided — body

- Peripheral and sacral oedema
- Raised jugular venous pressure
- Weight gain over days
- Abdominal distension, early fullness
- Enlarged, tender liver

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Daily weight taken the same way at the same time is the most sensitive routine measure of fluid change.

Educational reference. Fluid targets, diuretic changes and weight-alert thresholds are prescriber decisions set for the individual patient.