Congestive heart failure can be defined as a complex syndrome comprising the end stage of multiple cardiovascular disorders. Genetics of congestive heart failure focused thus far mainly on rare familiar forms of hypertrophic or dilated cardiomyopathy. These are often caused by rare and deleterious mutations showing Mendelian inheritance conferred by genes encoding largely for structural proteins of the myocardium. However, from an epidemiological point of view, these rare familial forms play a minor role in the overall population. By far the most cases of congestive heart failure show a complex inheritance and phenotype. This review article will focus on congestive heart failure as a complex trait and will discuss the impact of new technology (genome wide association studies) on the elucidation of common genetic risk factors for congestive heart failure.

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