

CARDIOMYOPATHY

What is Cardiomyopathy?

Cardiomyopathy is a general term that means "heart muscle disease", refers to a disease of the heart muscle. The walls of the heart chambers become stretched, enlarged, thick or rigid. The heart becomes weaker as Cardiomyopathy progresses and the heart is less able to pump blood through the body and maintain a normal electrical rhythm.

There are four main types of Cardiomyopathy:

- Dilated Cardiomyopathy. Most common type of the Cardiomyopathy. The heart muscle of the ventricles becomes dilated and the heart muscle cannot contract normally
- Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy. Also a common type of Cardiomyopathy and it may affect people of any age. The heart muscles cells have enlarged and the walls of the chambers thicken and they are less able to relax and fill with blood. Blood flow from the ventricle may be restricted. The ventricles have to work much harder to pump blood to the body
- Restrictive Cardiomyopathy. This condition tends to affect mostly elderly people. The walls of the heart chambers become stiff and rigid and they are unable to relax normally and fill with blood. Over time blood flow in the heart is reduced. This can lead to heart failure or arrhythmia
- Arrhythmogenic right ventricular dysplasia. This is a rare form of Cardiomyopathy. The muscle tissue in the right ventricle dies and is replaced with scar tissue. This disrupts the heart's electrical signals and causes arrhythmias

What causes it?

Cardiomyopathy may be inherited or acquired as a result of another disease or condition. Many times the cause of Cardiomyopathy is unknown. Major risk factors for Cardiomyopathy include:

- Family history of Cardiomyopathy, heart failure or sudden cardiac arrest
- Diabetes, other metabolic diseases or obesity
- Diseases that can damage the heart e.g. sarcoidosis, amyloidosis
- Long term alcoholism
- Long term high blood pressure

What are the symptoms?

Some people who have Cardiomyopathy have no signs or symptoms. Other people have no symptoms in the early stages of the condition but as the condition worsens the heart weakens. Symptoms of heart failure usually then occur.

- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Fatigue
- Swelling in the ankles, feet, legs and abdomen
- Dizziness, light headedness
- Chest pain
- Arrhythmias
- Heart murmur

How is it diagnosed?

Often a cardiologist diagnoses and treats Cardiomyopathy. Your doctor will diagnose Cardiomyopathy based on your medical history, a physical examination and the results of certain tests and procedures such as:

- Blood tests
- Chest X ray
- ECG
- Echocardiograph
- Cardiac catheterization
- Coronary angiograph

How can Cardiomyopathy affect my health?

In Cardiomyopathy the heart muscle becomes enlarged, thick or rigid. In rare cases the muscle tissue in the heart is replaced with scar tissue. As Cardiomyopathy worsens, the heart muscle becomes weaker. It is less able to pump blood through the body and maintain a normal electrical rhythm. This can lead to heart failure or arrhythmia. The weakening of the heart can also cause other complications such as heart valve problems.

Treatment

Not everyone who has Cardiomyopathy requires treatment. If you do not have signs or symptoms you may not require treatment.

If you do require treatment, treatment will depend on the type of Cardiomyopathy you have and the severity.

The main goals of treatment are:

- Manage any conditions that cause or contribute to the disease
- Control signs and symptoms so that you can live as normally as possible
- Stop the disease from getting worse
- Reduce complications and the chance of a sudden cardiac arrest

Lifestyle changes:

Certain lifestyle changes may help to control the symptoms of Cardiomyopathy:

- Eat healthily. Reduce your fat and cholesterol consumption
- Choose and prepare foods with little sodium(salt)
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation
- Increase your physical activity levels. Get advice about the exercises or physical activities that are suited to your specific health status
- Stop smoking
- Lose excess weight
- Reduce stress or learn techniques to manage stress

Medicines:

A number of medicines are used to treat Cardiomyopathy:

- Lower your blood pressure: ACE inhibitors such as Perindopril, Captopril, Lisinopril; Beta blockers i.e. Bisoprolol ; Angiotensin receptor blockers and Calcium channel blockers
- Slow your heart rate: Beta blockers; calcium channel blockers and Digoxin
- Keep your heart beating at a normal rhythm: Warfarin
- Balance electrolytes in your body: Aldosterone antagonists
- Remove excess fluid and sodium from your body: diuretics
- Prevent blood clots from forming: anticoagulants
- Reduce inflammation: corticosteroids

Surgery: Different types of surgery may be used to treat Cardiomyopathy.

- Septal myectomy: Open heart surgery used in people with severe hypertrophic obstructive Cardiomyopathy to remove part of the thickened septum that is blocking the left ventricle
- Surgically implanted devices:
 - A pacemaker may be inserted to help control the abnormal heart rhythms
 - A left ventricular assist device (LVAD) helps the heart pump blood to the body
 - An implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD) helps control life threatening arrhythmias
- Heart Transplant: A heart transplant is a last resort and for patients who have end-stage heart failure, in which all other treatments have failed

Your role in managing this condition

You can take steps to lower your risk for conditions that may lead to or complicate Cardiomyopathy such as coronary artery disease, high blood pressure and heart attack.

- Make lifestyle changes such as:
 - Follow a healthy diet
 - Try to avoid foods high in fat and cholesterol
 - Increase your physical activity levels
 - Stop smoking
 - Avoid using alcohol
 - Try to lose excess weight
- See your doctor regularly for your check ups
- Take your medicine for your high blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes as prescribed by your doctor
- Try to reduce stress in your life or learn techniques to cope with stress
- If Cardiomyopathy runs in your family, encourage your family members to get checked to see whether they have the condition

Disclaimer

The reader should always consult a doctor if they believe they may be suffering from this medical condition. The information contained herein is intended to assist understanding and should not take the place of your doctor's advice or instructions. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained herein, Universal Care does not accept responsibility for any errors or omissions or their consequences, and shall not be liable for any damages suffered arising out of the use of this information.

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