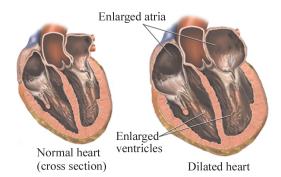


# **Heart Disease: Dilated Cardiomyopathy**



When you have dilated cardiomyopathy, your heart muscle has become weak and enlarged. It does not have the strength to pump enough blood to the rest of your body. Because the heart cannot pump hard enough, some blood remains in it after each heartbeat.

As more blood stays in the heart, the heart expands and stretches out of shape. This may lead to blood clots forming in the heart chambers. Also, heart valves may not be able to close properly and may leak. Most people with dilated cardiomyopathy develop heart failure

#### What causes it?

In many cases, doctors cannot tell what has caused dilated cardiomyopathy. It is sometimes passed down through families. Some things can damage the heart muscle and lead to cardiomyopathy. It can happen if:

- You have coronary artery disease or have had a heart attack.
- You have high blood pressure.
- You have a heart valve disease.

- You have inflammation of the heart muscle.
   This is called myocarditis, and it is caused by a virus.
- You drink too much alcohol or use illegal drugs, such as cocaine.
- You have been exposed to toxic metals, such as lead or mercury, which can weaken the heart.

### What are the symptoms?

You can have dilated cardiomyopathy for months or years before you have any symptoms. But as your heart muscle gets weaker, heart failure develops. **Heart failure** causes the following symptoms:

- You are weak and feel tired.
- You have trouble breathing during exercise or when you lie down.
- You have a cough, especially when you lie down.
- You have fluid buildup in your legs, ankles, feet, or belly.
- · You feel dizzy or lightheaded.
- You have sudden weight gain from fluid buildup.

# **Sudden heart failure** is an emergency. **Call 911 immediately** if:

- You have severe shortness of breath.
- You have a fast or irregular heartbeat.
- · You cough up foamy, pink mucus.

## How is dilated cardiomyopathy diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask how you have been feeling and about any health problems you have. He or she will give you a physical exam and will likely ask if anyone in your family has heart disease. Make sure to tell your doctor about all the medicines you take.

Your doctor will listen to your heart and lungs and will check your legs for fluid buildup. He or she may order a chest X-ray to look for fluid in your lungs and may do an echocardiogram or other tests to see how your heart is working. You may also have blood tests or other tests to help diagnose and treat your problem.

#### How is it treated?

In some cases, treating the cause will help. For example, if drinking too much alcohol caused your condition, you will need to stop drinking. This may keep the disease from getting worse.

#### **Medicines**

Several medicines can help improve blood flow and make it easier for your heart to pump blood. Your doctor may prescribe an ACE inhibitor, a "water pill" (diuretic), a beta-blocker, or other medicines

#### Changes you can make on your own

You may need to limit how much salt (sodium) you get from food and drinks. And you will need to limit how much fluid you drink if your doctor tells you to. Ask your doctor how much sodium and fluid vou can have each day.

Your doctor will tell you the kind of physical activity you can safely do. Most people may walk or ride a bike or do some other kind of exercise, if their condition allows it.

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.

Keep track of your symptoms and call your doctor if they change suddenly or get worse.

#### Other treatment

Your doctor may suggest a mechanical device for you. You might get a pacemaker (also called cardiac resynchronization therapy, or CRT) to help your heart pump blood. Or you might get an ICD (implantable-cardioverter defibrillator) to help prevent dangerous heart rhythms.

#### What to think about

If a doctor diagnoses dilated cardiomyopathy in its early stages, it might be easier to manage the disease. If the cause of your condition is hard to treat, heart failure may get worse.

Women who develop this problem during pregnancy should not get pregnant again.

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