

Cardiomyopathy: Disease of the Heart

Cardiomyopathy

Cardiomyopathy is a disease of your heart muscle. It causes your heart muscle to become enlarged, thick or rigid.

As the disease gets worse, your heart becomes weaker. It is less able to pump blood throughout your body and keep a normal electrical rhythm. This can cause heart failure or problems with the heart valves.

There are many types of cardiomyopathy.

Causes

Anyone can have cardiomyopathy, either at birth or with another disease. Causes include:

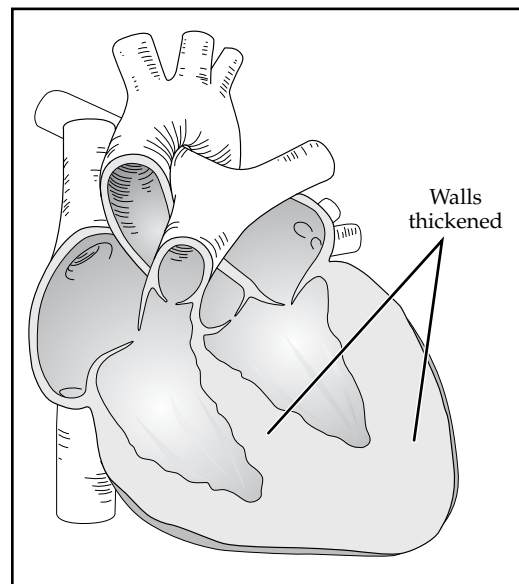
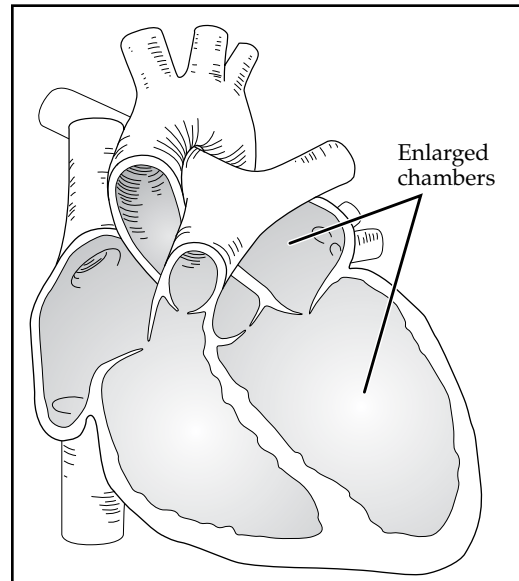
- a family history
- heart disease or heart attack
- a germ (virus or bacteria) that attacks your heart
- diabetes
- history of high blood pressure
- history of drinking too much alcohol.

Symptoms

As your heart weakens, you will notice symptoms of heart failure such as:

- being short of breath or having trouble breathing
- being very tired (fatigue)
- having swelling in your ankles, feet, legs, belly and veins in your neck.

You may have chest pain, dizziness or irregular heartbeats. You may not have any symptoms.



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**(Top) A heart with enlarged chambers.
(Bottom) A heart with thickened walls.**

(over)

How Your Doctor Will Confirm You Have Cardiomyopathy

Your doctor will ask you about your health and family history, give you an exam, and order tests and procedures.

You may partner with a cardiologist (doctor who specialized in heart disease).

Tests and procedures may include:

- blood tests
- chest X-ray
- EKG (electrocardiogram) to record your heart's electrical activity
- Holter and event monitor to record your heart's electrical activity for up to 48 hours
- echocardiography (echo) to create a moving picture of your heart
- stress test to see how hard your heart works during exercise.

There are other tests that can help your doctor confirm cardiomyopathy.

Treatments

Treatment will help you manage your symptoms and help keep the disease from getting worse.

Together, you and your doctor will decide which treatment options are best. Choices include:

- **lifestyle changes:**
 - Follow a heart-healthy diet.
 - Manage your stress.
 - Get enough exercise.
 - Stop using tobacco.
 - Aim for a healthy weight, if needed.

- **medicines to:**

- balance the electrolytes that help your fluid levels and keep your nerves and muscles working well
- keep your heart beating in a normal rhythm
- lower or raise your blood pressure
- prevent blood clots from forming
- reduce swelling
- remove extra sodium from your body
- slow or speed up your heart rate

- **procedures to put in devices:**

- **cardiac resynchronization therapy device** to coordinate contractions between the heart's left and right ventricles
- **implantable cardioverter defibrillator** to help control life-threatening arrhythmias by sending an electric shock to the heart to restore a normal heartbeat
- **left ventricular assist device** to help the heart pump blood to the body
- **pacemaker** to help control arrhythmias by using electrical pulses to prompt the heart to beat at a normal rate.

- **surgery:**

- open heart surgery to remove part of the thickened septum
- heart transplant to replace your heart with a heart from another person.

Adapted from the National Institutes of Health.