

# Broken Heart Syndrome (Takotsubo, or Stress, Cardiomyopathy)

## Broken Heart Syndrome

Broken heart syndrome is a short-term condition that affects part of the heart muscle.

A stressful or emotional situation can cause sudden heart muscle failure. It can feel like a heart attack (chest pain and shortness of breath) but it is not caused by blocked arteries.

A stressful situation causes the release of adrenaline (a hormone). When too much is released, it can disrupt the ability of the left ventricle to pump blood. The rest of the heart is not affected.

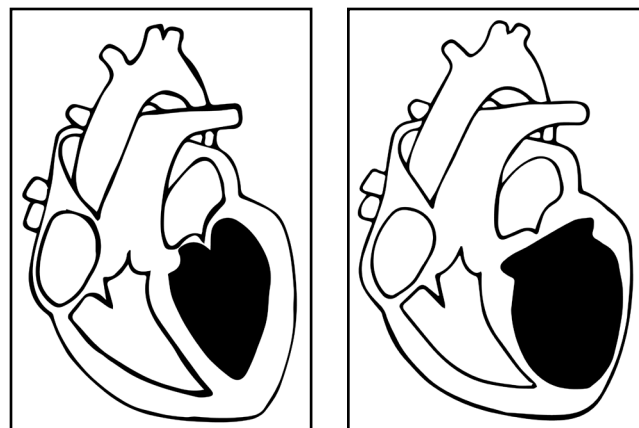
Treatment can manage the symptoms. Often, people fully recover with no long-term heart damage.

Broken heart syndrome is also known as Takotsubo cardiomyopathy or stress cardiomyopathy. It affects the left ventricle's ability to squeeze and can be life-threatening.

## Causes and Who is at Risk

People can get broken heart syndrome if they have intense stress such as:

- emotional stress (intense grief, anger, violence, abuse or surprise)
- physical stress (having surgery or having an injury or illness).



A

B

Drawings by Heidi Sandstad

**(A) The normal size and shape of a left ventricle. (B) In broken heart syndrome, the left ventricle is dilated (stretched) and the pumping function is weak.**

More women than men are affected. Women older than age 50 are more at risk. The reason is not known. In general, a person does not get it more than once.

## Symptoms

Symptoms are similar to a heart attack and may include:

- sudden chest pain
- shortness of breath
- irregular heartbeat.

*(over)*

## How Your Doctor Will Confirm You Have Broken Heart Syndrome

Your doctor will ask you about your health and family history, will give you an exam, and order tests and procedures that may include:

- blood tests
- chest X-ray
- EKG (electrocardiogram) to record your heart's electrical activity
- echocardiography (echo) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to create a moving picture of your heart
- coronary angiography or CT coronary angiography to look at the arteries or your heart.

## 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. (Cardiac rehabilitation might be an option.)
  - Stop using tobacco.
  - Aim for a healthy weight, if needed.
  - Take your medicines as prescribed.

- **medicines to:**

- keep your heart beating in a normal rhythm
- manage your blood pressure
- prevent blood clots from forming
- remove fluid build-up in your lungs and extra fluid in your body
- manage stress and anxiety

## When To Contact Your Doctor

Contact your doctor if you:

- have any new symptoms
- do not feel better after having treatment
- have questions or concerns.

## Follow-up Appointments

- Keep all follow-up appointments, even if you are feeling better.
- Your doctor will tell you what follow-up tests you need.
- You may have another echocardiogram to see if your heart's pumping function has recovered.

**Adapted from the National Institutes of Health.**