

Understanding Cardiomyopathy

Having any type of heart problem is frightening. It is even worse when you do not know what it is. Learning about the causes of cardiomyopathy, its signs and symptoms and what it is will help you understand and deal with your heart disease.

What is Cardiomyopathy?

Cardiomyopathy means **heart** (cardio) **muscle** (myo) **disease** (pathy). This disease changes the heart muscle and weakens it. The weakened heart muscle may become thin and get larger. The entire heart muscle is weak and pumps less effectively. The heart eventually goes into a state of pump failure. It cannot supply the body with enough blood flow.

Cardiomyopathy affects both sexes and all ages. Usually, it is a long-term (chronic) disease and you will have to adjust your life style. Treatment rarely cures cardiomyopathy, but may reduce the symptoms.

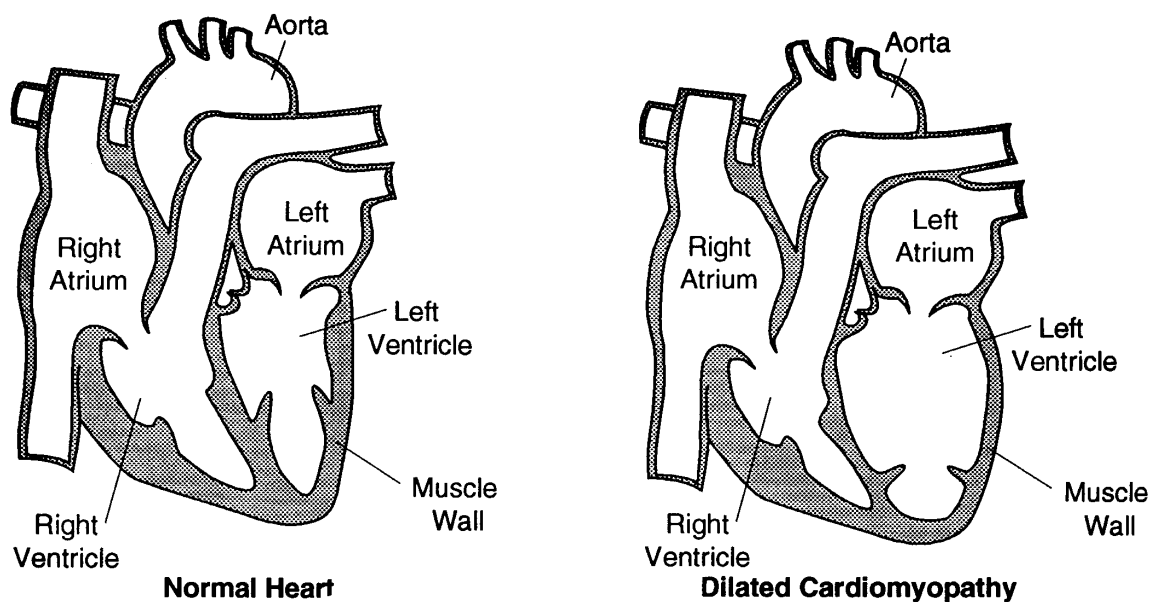
Learn more about your health care.

Types of Cardiomyopathy

There are three major types of cardiomyopathy.

Dilated Cardiomyopathy

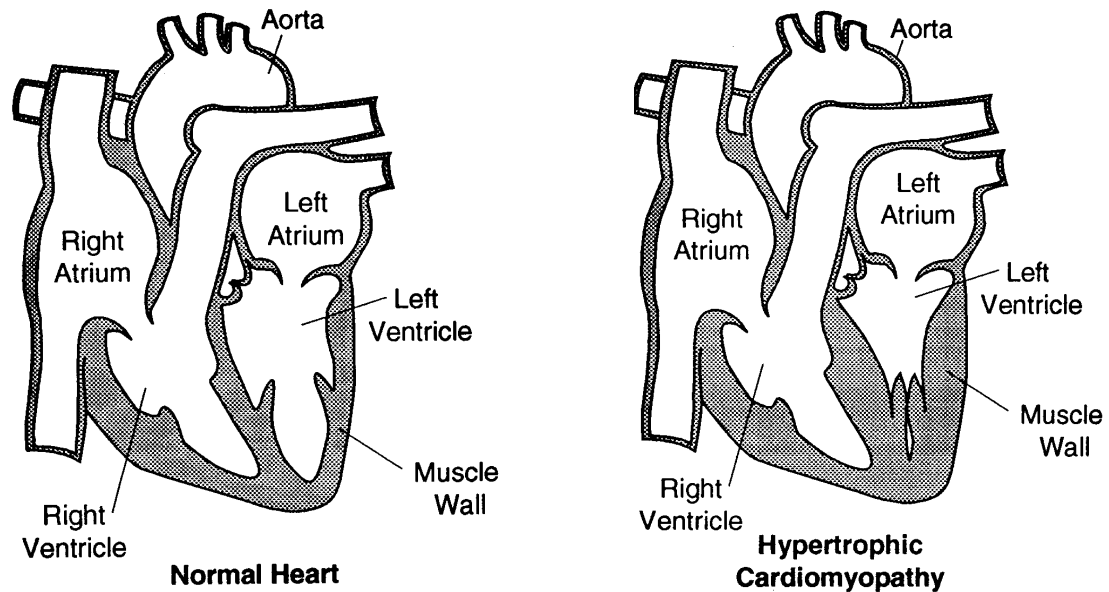
Dilated cardiomyopathy is the most common form of heart muscle disease. With this type of cardiomyopathy, the entire heart muscle is weak and pumps poorly. It is more common in males than females. Although it can happen at all ages, the average age is from 30 to 50 years. One-half of one percent of the population has dilated cardiomyopathy.



Many patients with cardiomyopathy are found to have coronary artery disease (Ischemic Cardiomyopathy). Researchers believe that dilated cardiomyopathy may be related to a recent viral infection. This infection may be present as a cold or flu, but it leads to the development of heart disease. Recent information says that 1 in 5 people with this heart disease have a family history, so cardiomyopathy may be inherited. In about one half of people with cardiomyopathy, the cause is never known. Other disorders, such as alcoholism, pregnancy, toxins, poor nutrition, and hormone disorders, and high blood pressure can result in cardiomyopathy.

Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy

With this less common type of cardiomyopathy, the heart cannot relax to fill with blood. It may be related to high blood pressure and often runs in families. It may cause an increase in the size of the heart muscle and obstruction of the blood flow out of the heart. Chest pain, trouble breathing, fatigue or lightheadedness, especially with activity may occur as a result of this.



Restrictive Cardiomyopathy

Restrictive cardiomyopathy is a less common form of cardiomyopathy where the heart muscle can pump, but cannot relax to fill with blood. High pressures in the heart occur. Problems with fluid build-up, swelling (edema) and fatigue may result.

Signs and symptoms of Cardiomyopathy

Sometimes the cause of cardiomyopathy is a combination of more than one condition. For example, alcohol use and high blood pressure together may cause this disease. Regardless of the causes, the signs and symptoms of cardiomyopathy are the same. These signs and symptoms are a result of the heart's inability to pump normally.

Cardiomyopathy, can results in heart failure. The signs and symptoms of heart failure vary. Some people have no symptoms at all, but they may have an abnormal ECG (electrocardiogram). An enlarged heart may be found on a routine chest x-ray. Some people complain of feeling tired for years before their symptoms get worse. The only symptom may be trouble breathing during or after activity. Swelling of the ankles and weight gain may finally cause a person to go to a doctor for help.

Signs and symptoms of cardiomyopathy include:

- Trouble breathing
- Weight gain
- Swelling (edema)
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Dizziness and lightheadedness
- Chest pain
- Irregular heart beat (arrhythmias and palpitations)

If you understand the causes of these symptoms, you will understand your treatment plan. Your body responds to illness in its own way. You can help manage this condition by talking to your doctor about your symptoms. Changes in usual signs and symptoms may mean that your pump failure is getting worse or is improving. Report any changes to your doctor, since treatment may need to be changed.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**