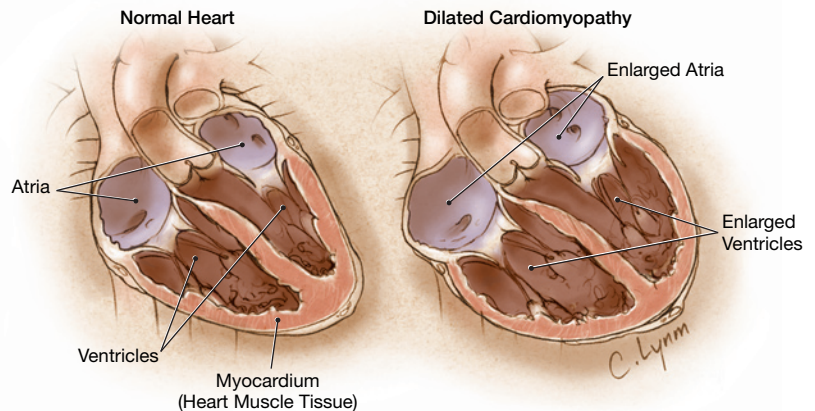


Cardiomyopathy

Cardiomyopathy, a condition in which the myocardium (heart muscle) does not work properly, can affect children and adults. Unlike heart disease due to heart attacks, where there is a problem with adequate blood flow to the heart, in cardiomyopathy the disease is in the heart muscle itself. The most common type of cardiomyopathy is **dilated cardiomyopathy**—the heart chambers gradually enlarge from ineffective heart muscle contraction. The end result of this is **congestive heart failure**—the heart cannot pump enough blood for the body's organs to function properly. The December 15, 2004, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about cardiomyopathy.



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Chest pain
- Irregular heartbeat
- **Syncope** (fainting) or lightheadedness
- Decreased mental function
- Swelling of the legs and feet or the abdomen

DIAGNOSIS

In addition to obtaining a complete medical history and performing a physical examination, your doctor may order other tests. Chest x-ray, electrocardiogram, **echocardiogram** (sound waves used to visualize heart structures and blood flow), and **coronary angiography** (injections into the coronary arteries to visualize them) are tests used to evaluate persons with congestive heart failure and cardiomyopathy. In some cases, a **biopsy** (small sample) of the heart muscle may be needed.

TREATMENT

Diet and lifestyle changes, including sodium restriction and regular exercise, are the first line of treatment for persons with cardiomyopathy. Several types of prescription medications may be used. Heart pacemakers and implantable **defibrillators** (devices to shock the heart out of an abnormal rhythm) may be necessary for persons with irregular heartbeat due to cardiomyopathy. In severe cases, heart transplantation may be considered for persons who have not responded to other treatments or whose heart function is severely diminished and is not expected to improve with maximal medical treatment.

Sources: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; American Heart Association; American College of Cardiology

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Heart Association
800/242-8721
www.americanheart.org
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
301/496-4236
www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- American College of Cardiology
800/253-4636
www.acc.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. A Patient Page on heart failure was published in the February 6, 2002, issue; one on left ventricular hypertrophy was published in the November 17, 2004, issue; one on risk factors for heart disease was published in the August 20, 2003, issue; and one on hypertension was published in the February 27, 2002, issue.

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