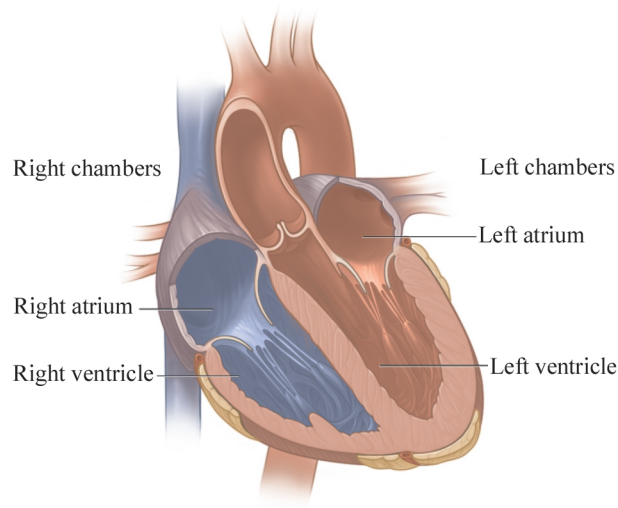


Heart Disease: Restrictive Cardiomyopathy



If you have restrictive cardiomyopathy, it means part of your heart muscle has become stiff. This stiffness happens in the lower heart chambers, which are called the ventricles. Normally, as your heart beats, the ventricles expand fully and fill with blood. This blood then gets pumped out to the body to supply it with oxygen and nutrients.

But with restrictive cardiomyopathy, the ventricles cannot stretch all the way to take in enough blood. So less blood is pumped out to the body. As it gets worse, heart failure develops.

What causes it?

Your doctor may not know what caused your restrictive cardiomyopathy. In many cases, the cause cannot be found. But certain conditions may lead to restrictive cardiomyopathy. It can happen if:

- You have a buildup of protein in the heart muscle. This is called cardiac amyloidosis.
- You have a buildup of iron in the heart muscle. This is called hemochromatosis.

- You have a condition that causes masses or bumps to form in the heart, lungs, or other organs. This is called sarcoidosis.
- You get radiation or chemotherapy treatments for cancer.
- You have a type of cancer called carcinoid syndrome.
- You have a buildup of certain white blood cells that can lead to scarring. This can be caused by Löeffler's syndrome or endomyocardial fibrosis.
- You have certain diseases you inherit from your family. Gaucher disease and Fabry's disease can lead to restrictive cardiomyopathy.

What are the symptoms?

You may not have any symptoms at first. Or you may have mild symptoms, such as feeling very tired or weak.

If your heart gets weaker, you will develop heart failure. When this happens, you will feel other symptoms, including:

- Shortness of breath, especially with activity.
- Tiredness.
- Trouble breathing when you lie down.
- Swelling in your legs.
- Chest pain.

How is it 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. This includes medicines you can buy without a prescription (over-the-counter), vitamins, or herbal treatments.

Your doctor 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.

Your doctor may want to test a small sample of your heart tissue. This is to make sure you do not have a different heart problem that is causing your symptoms. This test can be done at the same time as a cardiac catheterization. It is one of the tests used to check how your heart is working.

How is it treated?

If your doctor knows the cause of your restrictive cardiomyopathy, he or she will treat the cause. The focus of treatment is to try to prevent more heart damage.

In many cases, your doctor will not know the cause of your restrictive cardiomyopathy, or it can't be treated very well. The focus of treatment is to slow the progress of heart failure and to manage heart failure when it starts. You will need to take medicines that help make it easier for your heart to pump blood. You may also need medicines that help prevent blood clots from forming in your heart.

To help yourself feel better:

- Limit how much salt (sodium) you get from food and drinks. When your heart cannot pump blood well, your body tends to hold on to extra salt and water. This leads to fluid buildup and swelling.

- Ask your doctor how much salt you can eat each day.
- Avoid processed foods. Limit potato chips, pretzels, salted nuts, processed meats and cheeses, pizza, canned soups, canned vegetables, olives, fast foods, and frozen dinners.
- Eat fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables instead of canned foods. Buy foods labeled "low-sodium."
- Watch how much fluid you drink if your doctor tells you to. Ask your doctor how much is safe for you to drink.
- Weigh yourself each day to see if fluid is building up in your body.
- Find the right balance of rest and activity. You may need to limit exercise. Your doctor can help you find what is safe for you.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.

You may reach a point where you need a pacemaker or other device to help your heart beat normally. If you develop severe heart failure, a heart transplant may be an option.

What can you expect with restrictive cardiomyopathy?

It can be hard to treat restrictive cardiomyopathy because often the cause cannot be found. But if the cause is found and caught early, treatment can help. Medicines may be used to treat the cause. And treatment may limit some of the damage to the heart. But if the cause is hard to treat or not known, restrictive cardiomyopathy usually leads to heart failure over time.