



Expert Q&A's

Cardiomyopathy

1. This is a disease of the heart muscle, what causes it to become thickened, stretched or weakened?

There are numerous causes for cardiomyopathy. Cardiomyopathy is divided into three groups:

1. Dilated-either familial, post-viral or some other toxin such as excessive alcohol use or some chemotherapeutic agents.
2. Hypertrophic, this is a genetic abnormality leading to excessive thickness of the heart muscle
3. Restrictive, this is where abnormal proteins or cells infiltrate the heart from a variety of uncommon diseases such as amyloid heart disease.

2. Can the heart be strengthened like other muscles in the body? If so, how? If not, why not?

In almost all cases of cardiomyopathy, there are treatments directed at the underlying cause which are highly effective.

3. Can lifestyle modifications, such as quitting smoking and exercising regularly, negate the need for medication and surgery? Why/why not?

As cardiomyopathy is not typically a lifestyle disease, specific behaviours do not cause or treat the disease. But, with any underlying condition, correct lifestyle habits can improve the condition but do not negate appropriate medications or surgery, if indicated.



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4. Is cardiomyopathy something that can be cured or a condition that needs to be managed throughout your lifetime?

Typically, the various forms of cardiomyopathy need lifelong management and apart from heart transplantation there are no specific cures for this condition. Heart transplantation is only an option for people with end stage disease. Many people have milder versions of the variety of cardiomyopathies and with medications can have an otherwise normal life including lifespan.

5. Pregnant women are at risk of peripartum cardiomyopathy, what precautions can they take?

The cause for peripartum cardiomyopathy is unknown and unfortunately apart from strict cardiological supervision there are no real preventative measures for this condition.

There is often a full recovery in the months after pregnancy but in a significant number of cases the person is left with the degree of cardiac impairment. With further pregnancies, there is the risk of recurrence.

6. Symptoms such as oedema, swelling of the lower legs and feet, and abdominal bloating can be related to pregnancy, how can they tell if the issue is heart-related?

These symptoms are very common during normal pregnancies and are usually very benign. If, however, the swelling of the lower limbs and abdomen are severe, the woman should have a cardiological assessment with an echocardiogram to ensure that the heart is not involved.