

**ALDERFER & TRAVIS CARDIOLOGY, PC**  
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**Alcoholic Heart Disease**

**Definition**

Alcoholic cardiomyopathy is an alcohol-related heart disorder caused by excessive and habitual consumption of alcohol. Large quantities of alcohol have a toxic effect on heart muscle cells. Even a small amount of alcohol causes a measurable change in cell function.

In excess and over a period of time, alcohol can result in a weakened heart muscle. The heart muscle becomes unable to pump blood efficiently. This condition can eventually lead to heart failure. Decreased heart function also affects the lung, liver, and other body systems.

**Symptoms**

Symptoms of alcoholic cardiomyopathy include:

- sensation of feeling the heart beat (palpitations)
- irregular or rapid pulse
- loss of appetite
- swelling in the legs and ankles
- shortness of breath.

**Complications**

Complications with alcoholic cardiomyopathy can include congestive heart failure and cardiac arrhythmias (irregularities).

**Signs and Tests**

Your healthcare provider will make a diagnosis based on your medical history, including your use of alcohol. He/she will probably conduct various tests as well, including checking for an enlarged liver. If the tests indicate heart failure and alcoholic cardiomyopathy is diagnosed, treatment will be planned accordingly.

**Treatment**

One or more of the following treatments may be employed:

- digitalis or other medications to improve heart function
- diuretics to remove excessive fluid
- a low-salt diet
- complete abstinence from alcohol.

## **Prognosis (Expectations)**

The prognosis is mixed. Some patients follow a progressive downhill course. Occasionally, the heart muscle function may return to normal. If excessive alcohol consumption contributed to a weakened heart muscle, some patients have shown a marked improvement after they stopped drinking.

## **Tips**

- Call your physician if have any symptoms that might indicate a heart attack, even if you think you are "too young" to be having heart problems.
- If you have been diagnosed with alcoholic cardiomyopathy, do not consume alcohol. Get help through a support group such as a clinic, Alcoholics Anonymous, or another group your physician can suggest.
- Control other risk factors for heart disease. Eat a nutritious diet, get into an exercise program, and do not smoke.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) World Services  
475 Riverside Drive, 11th Floor  
New York, NY 10115  
(212) 870-3400

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters  
1600 Corporate Landing Parkway  
Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD)  
12 West 21st St.  
New York, NY 10010  
1-800-NCA-CALL