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MYOCARDITIS

What is myocarditis?

The myocardium is the muscular wall of the heart. Myocarditis is an inflammation of that muscular wall. Myocarditis can cause a rapid onset of heart failure or other symptoms. It is a fairly uncommon disorder, affecting approximately 8 out of 100,000 people.

What causes myocarditis?

Myocarditis can be caused by an infection (viral, bacterial, parasitic or fungal), by rheumatic fever, diphtheria, tuberculosis, exposure to chemicals or radiation, connective tissue diseases and toxic drug poisoning. Viral infections such as coxsackie virus, adenovirus, and echovirus are the most common cause in children.

What are the symptoms of myocarditis?

Symptoms of myocarditis include:

- fever
- chest pain
- joint pain
- palpitations
- rapid heartbeat
- signs and symptoms associated with congestive heart failure

How is myocarditis diagnosed?

Your doctor will take your history and perform a physical exam. If symptoms appear within 6 months of a recent infection, myocarditis might be suspected. Your doctor will look for a rapid heartbeat (tachycardia) and signs of heart failure (including congestion in the veins of the lungs and body).

Some diagnostic tests and/or imaging techniques can be helpful in diagnosing myocarditis. These tests include:

- EKG
- chest X-ray
- heart biopsy
- cultures

How is myocarditis treated?

If myocarditis is caused by a bacterial infection, your doctor will prescribe antibiotics.

Myocarditis is treated with analgesics or anti-inflammatory drugs to relieve pain. You may require treatment for an arrhythmia. If this is the case, your doctor may prescribe antiarrhythmic medications. Additional oxygen is often given to assist the heart in oxygenating the blood. Activity may be restricted to bedrest to reduce cardiac workload, and the diet may be salt/sodium restricted. A heart transplant may be considered if the condition is severe and unresponsive to treatment.