

ALDERFER & TRAVIS CARDIOLOGY, PC
670 Lawn Ave., Suite 3A Sellersville, PA 18960
Tel (215)257-9500 FAX (215) 257-9500

PERICARDITIS

What is pericarditis?

Pericarditis is an inflammation of the thin sac that surrounds the heart (known as the pericardium). This can cause pain as the inflamed pericardium rubs against the heart. Fluid can build up in the pericardium, which can compress the heart and affect its function.

What causes pericarditis?

Pericarditis can be caused by infection from a virus, bacterium or fungus. Viral infections are the most common cause of pericarditis in children.

Pericarditis can result from injury to the chest. It can result following a heart attack. It can occur several weeks following heart surgery (post pericardiotomy syndrome). It can result from radiation therapy to the chest. Certain disease processes can cause pericarditis, including cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, kidney failure, AIDS/HIV infection, leukemia and autoimmune disorders. Medications that suppress the immune system can cause pericarditis. Often, the cause of pericarditis is unknown. Pericarditis occurs most often in men aged 20 to 50. It occurs in approximately 1 out of 1,000 people.

What are the symptoms of pericarditis?

Symptoms of pericarditis can include:

- sharp pain behind the breastbone that increases when taking deep breaths (may radiate to the neck, shoulder, back, or abdomen)
- fever
- chills
- sweating
- pain with swallowing
- dry cough
- swelling of the abdomen (occasionally)
- ankle, feet, and leg swelling (occasionally)
- anxiety
- fatigue

How is pericarditis diagnosed?

Your doctor will listen to your heart with a stethoscope for signs of the pericardium rubbing against the heart, and for faint or distant heart sounds. He/she might also listen for signs of fluid in the space around the lungs (pleural effusion).

Certain diagnostic tests or imaging procedures can help diagnose pericarditis. They

include:

- chest X-ray
- chest MRI scan
- heart MRI or heart CT scan
- coronary angiography
- echocardiogram
- CBC
- pericardiocentesis
- blood culture or pericardial fluid culture

How is pericarditis treated?

If pericarditis is due to a bacterial infection, antibiotics will be prescribed. Activity is usually restricted to bedrest with your head raised, to reduce the workload on the heart. Medications to relieve pain and inflammation may be prescribed, including aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (like ibuprofen), or corticosteroids. If excess fluid in the pericardium is affecting your heart's ability to function, your doctor may recommend that the excess fluid be removed using a needle. In some cases surgery may be required to remove part of the pericardium if the disorder is chronic or recurrent.