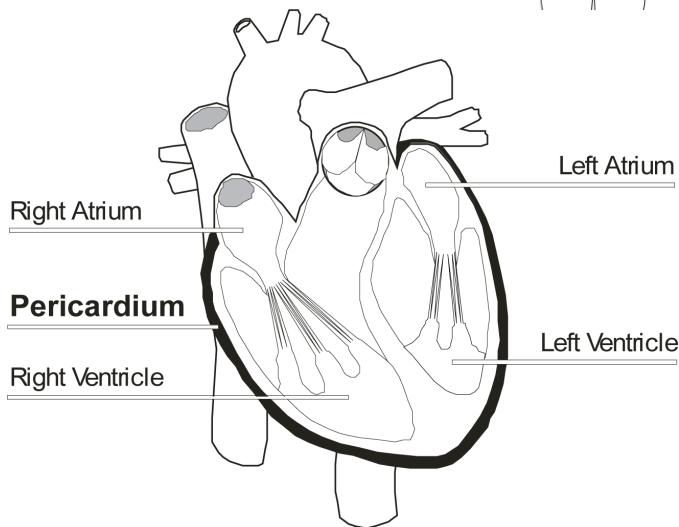
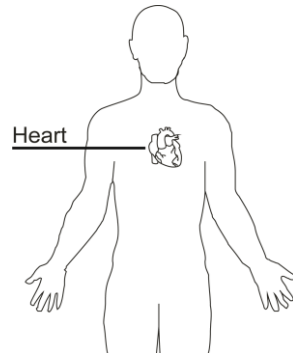


Pericarditis

What is pericarditis?

A two-layered sac covers the heart. It is called the pericardium (say *pear-eh-card-ee-um*) or pericardial (say *pear-eh-card-ee-al*) sac.



Cross-section view of the heart

Pericarditis (say *pear-eh-card-eye-tis*) is a condition where the heart sac becomes swollen or inflamed. This condition usually comes on suddenly and can last up to several months.

Pericardial effusion (say *ee-few-shun*) is the build-up of excess fluid in the space around the heart. This causes the layers of the sac to swell or thicken. Any swelling or extra fluid can limit the heart's ability to pump normally.

What causes pericarditis?

There are many causes of this condition. The most common reason is a viral infection. However, bacterial, fungal, or parasitic infections can cause it. Pericarditis can also be a result of other health or inflammatory disorders

What are the signs of pericarditis?

It is common to have chest pain that is:

- sharp or stabbing
- increases with coughing, swallowing, taking a deep breath, or lying flat
- eased by sitting up or leaning forward

Along with pain, you might also notice:

- trouble breathe when lying down
- pain in the back, neck, or left shoulder
- a dry cough
- swelling in the feet, ankles, or legs
- general feeling of weakness or tiredness
- feeling anxious

How we tell you have pericarditis

This condition is often found when we listen to your heart and lungs with a stethoscope.

A sign of pericarditis is an abnormal 'creaking' or 'rubbing' sound coming from your inflamed heart sac. The sound can get even louder when you lean forward. We might also hear a crackling sound in your lungs.

You might have these tests:

- **Chest x-ray** to look at the size of your heart and any fluid in your lungs.
- **Electrocardiograph** (ECG or EKG) to check for changes in your normal heart rhythm.
- **Echocardiogram** (Echo) uses ultrasound to look at how your heart is working and if there is any fluid around the heart.
- **MRI or CT scan of the heart** to look at the extra fluid around the heart or signs of the layers being inflamed.
- **Other laboratory tests** to check the blood and heart, test the fluid around the heart, and find what could be causing the pericarditis.

How we treat pericarditis

We treat pericarditis with medicines for pain and for the swelling. Depending on the cause, we might also prescribe an antibiotic or antifungal medicine.

For most people, they only need to take medicines for several weeks to clear up the inflammation.

Sometimes the fluid builds up and needs to be removed. To drain the fluid, a doctor numbs the area on your chest with freezing medicine called a local anesthetic (say *an-eh-s-th-eh-tic*). Then the doctor puts a long thin needle through your chest wall into the heart sac and pulls out the extra fluid. This is called a pericardiocentesis (say *pear-eh-card-ee-oh-sen-tee-sis*).

Sometime a person needs surgery when the pericarditis severely restrict the heart from beating normally.

How long does it last?

For most people, pericarditis can last up to 3 months. After you recover, you should be able to return to your normal daily activities.

Sometimes the pericarditis can return every few months. If this happens, it is treated with anti-inflammatory medicines.

When to get help

Call 9-1-1 if you notice any of the following:

- You have severe chest pain that does not go away with changing position or pain medicine.
- You have severe pain in your left shoulder or neck.
- You find it hard to breathe, even when resting.

Call your family doctor if you have any of the following:

- a fever over 38.5°C (101.3°F) that does not go away with plain acetaminophen (such as Regular Tylenol) or ibuprofen (such as Advil, Motrin)
- feel like your heart is skipping a beat or beating too fast
- cannot stop coughing
- find it hard to swallow
- swelling in your ankles, feet, or legs.

To learn more, it's good to ask:

- Your family doctor
- Fraser Health Virtual Care
1-800-314-0999 or live chat online at fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare
10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., daily
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf and hard of hearing) or go online at HealthLinkBC.ca