Cardiomyopathy simply means disease of the heart muscle. The heart is a pump that moves blood around your body and lungs. Cardiomyopathy puts you at risk for:

- Heart failure
- Blood clots
- Changes in heart rhythm
- Problems with the heart’s valves

Things that may happen when your heart is not working properly:

- Heart chambers and muscles change in shape and size, which affects how well the heart works.
- Heart beats faster to try to pump the same amount of blood to the rest of the body.
- Over time, even with these changes, the heart’s pumping becomes more inefficient, which may result in:
  - Fluid building up in the lungs, causing shortness of breath.
  - Fluid building up in the body, causing swelling in the lower legs and/or abdomen.
  - A bloated feeling and sometimes less of an appetite.
  - Increased fatigue and/or lethargy.
  - Kidney dysfunction.
Symptoms of Cardiomyopathy

It is possible to have cardiomyopathy without any symptoms. This happens when the body is able to manage in spite of the damage to the heart. Some symptoms that might happen are below:

**Warning Signs of Heart Failure**

- Unusual dizziness, lightheadedness, or feeling faint
- A sensation of rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Difficulty breathing or waking up at night short of breath
- Reduced appetite or feeling bloated
- Increased fatigue or tiredness
- Swelling on the ankles and/or feet

If you develop any of these symptoms, please call your physician.

Let your doctor know if you have unexplained weight gain.
Some Causes of Cardiomyopathy

This list has some of the more common causes of cardiomyopathy. Sometimes the cause is not known (idiopathic).

- Some genetic conditions
- Heart attack
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Heart valve problems
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Thyroid disease
- Viral infections that reach the heart muscle
- Sarcoidosis
- Amyloidosis
- Excessive alcohol use and use of some illegal drugs, such as amphetamines
- Some chemotherapy drugs
- Pregnancy

Types of Cardiomyopathy

- **Dilated Cardiomyopathy:** The heart muscle becomes stretched out and weakened. It is less able to push blood out of the heart into the body.

- **Ischemic Cardiomyopathy:** Occurs when the arteries that bring blood and oxygen to the heart are blocked. There may be a build-up of cholesterol and other substances, known as plaque, in the arteries that bring oxygen to the heart muscle tissue.

- **Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy:** Thickening of the heart muscle that can cause the chambers in the heart to become smaller. This often occurs as a result of genetic conditions.

- **Restrictive Cardiomyopathy:** Part of the heart muscle may be stiff and does not fill properly. This means there is less blood in the heart when it pumps.

- **Peripartum Cardiomyopathy:** A rare condition where the heart muscle becomes weaker toward the end stages of pregnancy or within the first few months after giving birth. The cause is not always clear. A doctor may advise a woman who experiences this to not have more children. Some medications used to treat this can pass through breast milk so breastfeeding may need to be avoided.

- **Stress-induced Cardiomyopathy:** Also known as “broken-heart syndrome” or “takotsubo cardiomyopathy.” This is rare and usually happens after someone has been under a lot of acute stress (not chronic) or gets bad news. Part of the main chamber that sends blood to the rest of the body balloons out and stops squeezing properly. The exact cause is unknown, although there are some theories about how this can happen. For most people, the condition can be corrected with proper treatment.
Testing for Cardiomyopathy

Your doctor will want to run tests on your heart to help decide the best treatment plan for you. These are some of the more common ones:

• **Echocardiogram:** This is an ultrasound of your heart. It shows how well blood is pumping through your heart and looks at your heart muscles and valves.

• **EKG (Electrocardiogram):** The heart uses electrical signals to know when to beat. This test measures whether these signals are transmitting properly.

• **Laboratory Tests:** These can be used to look at your electrolytes, cholesterol, and liver and kidney functions. A special test called the BNP (brain natriuretic peptide) can tell if the heart muscle is struggling or under stress.

• **Angiogram:** This shows pictures of the pressures inside the heart and where there may be blockages in the arteries. It can also be used to check heart valves.

• **Chest X-Ray:** This takes a picture showing the size of your heart. It also shows if there is fluid in the lungs.

Treating Cardiomyopathy

There are a number of treatments used for cardiomyopathy. Which treatments are used depends on the type of cardiomyopathy being treated.

• Controlling underlying conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure (hypertension).

• Lifestyle changes, such as:
  • Stop smoking.
  • Reduce or eliminate alcohol, according to your doctor’s recommendations.
  • Reduce the amount of salt in your diet to a maximum of 2000 mg per day.
  • Moderate exercise as recommended by your doctor.
  • Reach and maintain a healthy weight.

• Common medications:
  • Your doctor will prescribe medications that help the heart work more efficiently.
  • These medications may include ACE Inhibitors, ARBs, Beta Blockers, and Digoxin.
  • These medications can help the heart return to a more normal shape and size. It’s important to take your medications as prescribed by your doctor, even if you’re feeling better.

• Implanted defibrillator: A device that monitors the electrical signals that tell the heart when to beat. It can shock the heart to correct and fix certain dangerous arrhythmias (changes in the way the electrical signals go to the heart muscle). These arrhythmias can affect some patients with cardiomyopathy.