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What causes heart to be enlarged

An enlarged heart or cardiomegaly is not a disease but a symptom of various conditions and is treatable by addressing the underlying issue. Enlargement occurs when the heart chambers become dilated or the walls thicken abnormally. A slightly bigger-than-average heart can still function normally, but if cardiomegaly progresses, the heart's ability to pump blood declines. Most often, doctors discover cardiomegaly through routine chest x-rays. 1. Symptoms of an Enlarged Heart In its early and moderate stages, an enlarged heart is often asymptomatic, meaning it does not cause noticeable symptoms. Once it becomes difficult for the organ to pump blood, signs of congestive heart failure usually emerge. These may include: Intense heart palpitations (episodes of irregular heartbeat that come and go)Shortness of breath, especially during physical activityChest painLeg swelling (edema)Tiredness or fatigueIncreased abdominal size due to edema or fat accumulationFainting spells or extreme dizziness Shortness of breath may be so severe it feels similar to an asthma attack, and chest pain often worsens when accompanied by breathing difficulties. URL of this page: Also called: Dilated cardiomyopathy, Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, Myocardiopathy, Restrictive cardiomyopathy Cardiomyopathy is the name for diseases of the heart muscle. These diseases enlarge your heart muscle or make it thicker and more rigid than normal. In rare cases, scar tissue replaces the muscle tissue. Some people live long, healthy lives with cardiomyopathy. Some people don't even realize they have it. In others, however, it can make the heart less able to pump blood through the body. This can cause serious complications, including Heart attacks, high blood pressure, infections, and other diseases can all cause cardiomyopathy. Some types of cardiomyopathy run in families. In many people, however, the cause is unknown. Treatment might involve medicines, surgery, other medical procedures, and lifestyle changes. NIH: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Cardiomyopathy (Medical Encyclopedia) Also in Spanish The information on this site should not be used as a substitute for professional medical care or advice. Contact a health care provider if you have questions about your health. Medically reviewed by Daniel Murrell, M.D. — Written by Stephanie Watson — Updated on September 18, 2018SymptomsCausesRisk factorsDiagnosisTreatmentComplicationsPreventionOutlookAn enlarged heart (cardiomegaly) means that your heart is bigger than normal. Your heart can become enlarged if the muscle works so hard that it thickens, or if the chambers widen.An enlarged heart isn't a disease. It's a symptom of a heart defect or condition that makes the heart work harder, such as cardiomyopathy, heart valve problems, or high blood pressure.An enlarged heart can't pump blood as efficiently as a heart that's not enlarged. This can lead to complications like stroke and heart failure.Sometimes an enlarged heart doesn't cause any symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they can include:shortness of breathan irregular heart rhythm (arrhythmia)swelling in the legs and ankles caused by fluid buildup (edema)fatiguedizzinessSymptoms that indicate a medical emergency include:chest paintrouble catching your breathpain in your arms, back, neck, or jawfaintingYour heart can enlarge because of a condition you're born with — congenital — or a heart problem that develops over time.Any disease that makes your heart work harder to pump blood through your body can cause an enlarged heart. Just as the muscles of your arms and legs get bigger when you work them, your heart gets bigger when you work it.The most common causes of an enlarged heart are ischemic heart disease and high blood pressure. Ischemic heart disease occurs when narrowed arteries, caused by fatty deposits that build up in your arteries, prevent blood from getting to your heart. Other conditions that can make your heart enlarge include:CardiomyopathyCardiomyopathy is a progressive heart disease with several types. Diseases that damage the heart muscle can cause it to enlarge. The more damage that occurs, the weaker and less able to pump the heart becomes.Heart valve diseaseInfections, connective tissue diseases, and some medications can damage the valves that keep blood flowing in the right direction through your heart. When blood flows backwards, the heart has to work harder to push it out.Heart attackDuring a heart attack, blood flow to part of the heart is blocked completely. The lack of oxygen-rich blood damages the heart muscle.Thyroid diseaseThe thyroid gland produces hormones that regulate the body's metabolism. Both overproduction (hyperthyroidism) and underproduction (hypothyroidism) of these hormones can affect the heart rate, blood pressure, and size of the heart.Irregular heart rhythm (arrhythmia)If you have an irregular heartbeat, instead of beating in its familiar lub-dub pattern, the heart flutters or beats too slowly or quickly. An irregular heart rhythm can cause blood to back up in the heart and eventually damage the muscle.Congenital conditionsCongenital cardiomegaly is a heart disorder you're born with. Congenital heart defects that cause this symptom include:atrial septal defect, a hole in the wall separating the two upper chambers of the heartventricular septal defect, a hole in the wall separating the two lower chambers of the heartcoarctation of the aorta, a narrowing of the aorta, the main artery that carries blood from the heart to the rest of the bodypatent ductus arteriosus, a hole in the aortaEbstein's anomaly, a problem with the valve that separates the two right chambers of the heart (atrium and ventricle)tetralogy of Fallot (TOF), a combination of birth defects that disrupt the normal flow of blood through the heartOther possible causes of an enlarged heart include:You're more likely to get cardiomegaly if you're at risk for heart diseases. Risk factors include:high blood pressureobesitysedentary lifestyleparent or sibling with an enlarged heartpast heart attackmetabolic disorders, like thyroid diseaseheavy or excessive drug or alcohol useYour doctor will start with a physical exam and a discussion of your symptoms. A number of different tests can check the structure and function of your heart. A chest X-ray may be the first test your doctor does because it can show whether your heart is enlarged.Tests like these can help your doctor find the cause of the enlargement:Echocardiogram (ECG or EKG) uses sound waves to look for problems with your heart's chambers.Electrocardiogram monitors the electrical activity in your heart. It can diagnose an irregular heart rhythm and ischemia.Blood tests check for substances in your blood produced by conditions that cause an enlarged heart. Like thyroid disease.A stress test involves walking on a treadmill or pedaling a stationary bike while your heart rhythm and breathing are monitored. It can show how hard your heart is working during exercise.Computerized tomography (CT) scans use X-rays to produce detailed images of your heart and other structures in your chest. It can help diagnose valve disease or inflammation.Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) uses strong magnets and radio waves to produce pictures of your heart.In pregnancyDuring pregnancy, doctors can use a test called a fetal echocardiogram to diagnose heart defects in the unborn baby. This test uses sound waves to create pictures of the baby's heart.Your doctor might recommend a fetal echocardiogram if you have a family history of cardiomegaly or heart defects, or if your baby has a genetic disorder like Down syndrome.Your doctor will prescribe a treatment plan for the condition that's causing your enlarged heart. For example:high blood pressure: ACE inhibitors, angiotensin receptor blockers (ARBs), and beta-blockersirregular heartbeat: anti-arrhythmic drugs, pacemaker, and implanted cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD)heart valve problems: surgery to fix or replaced the damaged valvenarrowed coronary arteries: percutaneous coronary intervention, coronary artery bypass grafting (CABG), and nitratesheart failure: diuretics, beta-blockers, inotropes, and in a small minority of people, left ventricular assist device (LVAD)Other procedures can fix congenital heart defects. If you try a few treatments and they don't work, you may need a heart transplant.Lifestyle changesYou can manage an enlarged heart with lifestyle changes like these:Exercise. Exercise on most days of the week. Ask your doctor which types of exercises are safest for you.Quit smoking. Methods like nicotine replacement products and therapy can help you stop.Lose weight. Losing weight, especially if you're overweight, can help.Limit certain foods. Limit salt, cholesterol, and saturated and trans fats in your diet.Avoid certain things. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and drugs like cocaine.Relax. Practice relaxation techniques like meditation or yoga to reduce stress.The conditions that cause cardiomegaly can damage the heart muscle. They can lead to complications if left untreated. This includes:Heart failure. When the left ventricle enlarges, it can lead to heart failure. Then the heart isn't able to pump enough blood to the body.Blood clots. When the heart doesn't pump as well as it should, blood can pool and clump together into clots. A blood clot can travel to the brain and get stuck in a blood vessel there, causing a stroke.Heart murmur. When valves in your heart don't close properly, they create an abnormal sound called a murmur.Cardiac arrest. If your heart is enlarged, it may not get enough blood which can lead to cardiac arrest. The heart can stop working properly, which can cause sudden death.You may not be able to prevent conditions that occur before birth. Yet you can prevent later damage to your heart that can make it enlarge by:You should also see your doctor for regular checkups to make sure your heart is healthy. If you have a heart problem, you might also need to see a cardiologist.Your outlook depends on the underlying cause of your enlarged heart. Following the treatment plan your doctor recommends can help keep your heart healthy and prevent any complications. Last medically reviewed on February 9, 2018 An enlarged aorta is usually detected during a heart ultrasound, or echocardiogram, says Dr. William Davis from HealthCentral. Defined as an aorta measuring 3.7 centimeters or greater, the condition is believed to advance at a rate of about 2 millimeters per year, or 1 centimeter every five years. Once the aorta measures 4.5 centimeters, it is classified as an aneurysm, defined as a balloon-like bulge in an artery by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Although usually asymptomatic, an aneurysm in the abdominal portion of the aorta sometimes causes throbbing in the abdomen, deep back pain or gnawing abdominal pain. Alternatively, an aneurysm in the chest may cause hoarseness, coughing, shortness of breath or jaw, neck, back or chest pain. The greatest danger inherent in this condition is rupture of the aorta, which causes extremely rapid blood loss and is usually fatal, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. A second serious complication is aortic dissection, a condition in which the lining of the aorta tears away and allows blood to collect, or "dissect," along the tear, causing excruciating, sharp pain in the upper back that travels down into the chest or arms. This is also usually fatal if not treated right away.Surgical repair is the most common treatment of an aortic aneurysm; however, lifestyle changes sometimes keep the condition temporarily under control. Dr. Davis recommends a low carbohydrate diet, vitamin D and vitamin C supplementation and Omega 3 fish oils to treat inflammation and aid in preventing the formation of plaque. Each individual should check with a healthcare provider for specific recommendations about care.

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