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# Understanding Ischemic Cardiomyopathy

You have been diagnosed with ischemic cardiomyopathy. This sheet will help you better understand the disease. Knowing more about it can help you make the best decisions about your care. If you have any questions or concerns, talk with your healthcare provider. They are here to help.

## How to say it

ih-SKEE-mihk kahr-dee-oh-mi-AH-puh-thee

## What is ischemic cardiomyopathy?

Ischemic cardiomyopathy is a disease of the heart muscle. For some time now, your heart has not been getting enough oxygen-rich blood. This lack of blood flow is called ischemia. Without enough blood coming in, your heart has become damaged and weak. Now it has to work harder to pump blood to the rest of your body.

## What causes ischemic cardiomyopathy?

The main cause of ischemic cardiomyopathy is coronary artery disease (CAD). With CAD, the coronary arteries have become lined with plaque. This sticky substance is made up of fat, cholesterol, and other materials. As plaque builds up, it narrows the arteries, limiting blood flow to the heart. It may even block blood flow to the heart, causing a heart attack.

## What are the symptoms of ischemic cardiomyopathy?

You may have no symptoms of this disease. Or your symptoms may range from mild to severe. The most common symptoms are shortness of breath and chest pain called angina. These often occur when doing physical activity. Depending on your heart's condition, you may also have:

- Problems breathing when laying down
- Extreme tiredness
- Trouble doing physical activity
- Irregular heartbeat

## How is ischemic cardiomyopathy treated?

Your healthcare provider will talk with you about your treatment options. They will depend on things like your age, your overall health, and your personal preferences. Together, you and your healthcare provider can decide what treatment is best for you.

Your healthcare provider will talk with you about making some lifestyle changes, if needed. These can help prevent ischemic cardiomyopathy from getting worse. You will also feel better overall. Lifestyle changes you may need to make include:

- Quitting smoking, if you smoke

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- Getting more physically active
  - Choosing healthier foods
  - Cutting back on alcohol, if you drink
  - Losing weight, if you are overweight
  - Coping with stress better
  - Getting good sleep

These changes will take time. So be patient with yourself. And know that your care team is here to help. Reach out to them when needed. They can give you the support you need to make these changes possible.

Along with lifestyle changes, your healthcare provider will talk with you about your treatment plan. It may include 1 or more of the following:

- **Medicines.** Your provider may give you medicines to help ease your symptoms and improve your heart's function. These include medicines such as aspirin, statins, beta-blockers, nitrates, diuretics, and other medicines that help reduce workload on the heart and lower blood pressure. Some of these medicines may cause side effects. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any problems.
- **Heart surgery, or revascularization.** Depending on your condition, you may benefit from having coronary artery graft surgery (CABG) or a procedure called percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI). These can help prevent further damage to your heart.
- **Implanted device.** Sometimes people with ischemic cardiomyopathy start to have problems with their heart rate or rhythm. In this case, a pacemaker or defibrillator may help.
- **Heart transplant.** If the heart becomes too weak over time, it may need to be replaced. A heart transplant is often done after all other treatments have been tried.

## What problems can ischemic cardiomyopathy cause?

Ischemic cardiomyopathy can lead to other health problems. These are called complications. They may include:

- Irregular heartbeat
- Heart valve problems
- Stroke
- Heart attack
- Heart failure
- Cardiac arrest

## What else can you do to feel better?

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Work closely with your healthcare provider. They are here to support you in your treatment decisions. It's also helpful to take an active role in your care, such as:

- Keeping all appointments
- Getting regular screenings or other tests
- Taking your medicines as directed
- Building heart-healthy habits

## **Call**

If at any time you have the following symptoms, call right away:

- Trouble breathing
- Severe chest pain
- Loss of consciousness

## **When to call your healthcare provider**

Reach out to your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your provider
- Symptoms that don't get better or get worse, such as angina
- New symptoms