

Focus On: Pericardial Effusion

Pericardial effusion is a buildup of too much fluid in the sac around your heart.

This sac is called the pericardium.

Normally, there is a small amount of fluid between this sac and your heart.

This fluid surrounds and helps cushion your heart.

Extra fluid can be caused by many things, such as inflammation of the sac, a heart attack, or kidney failure.

The symptoms depend on how much fluid there is and how fast the fluid builds up.

Symptoms may include: Chest pain; trouble breathing; fast heartbeat; and lightheadedness, dizziness, or fainting.

Some people have no symptoms.

If there is only a small amount of extra fluid in your pericardium, your doctor will monitor you to see if the fluid goes away. You may not need other treatments.

If you do need treatment, your options will depend on the cause of the extra fluid, the amount of fluid, and your symptoms.

Potential treatments include medicine to treat the underlying cause or to manage symptoms, a procedure called a pericardiocentesis that uses a tube to drain the fluid, or surgery.

To learn more about pericardial effusion, talk to your doctor.