

Focus On: Pericarditis

The pericardium is the sac that protects and surrounds your heart.

Pericarditis happens when the pericardium swells and gets irritated.

It's usually not a serious problem, and most people feel better in a couple of weeks.

The main symptom is a sharp pain in the center or left side of your chest. The pain may spread to one or both shoulder blades.

For some people the pain may feel dull, not sharp. And it may be worse when you lie down or take a deep breath.

Other symptoms may include a mild fever, weakness, and coughing.

Treatment for pericarditis will depend on the cause of your symptoms and how serious they are.

Typically, only medicines are needed.

Medicines are often used to manage symptoms, treat the underlying cause, and reduce the risk of complications.

Medicines can also help prevent pericarditis from coming back.

However, if fluid builds up around the heart, you may need a procedure to drain the fluid. And in rare cases, surgery may be needed.

While you recover, get plenty of rest. Avoid exercise and strenuous activity.

And follow your doctor's advice about what problems to watch for.

To learn more about pericarditis, talk to your doctor.