

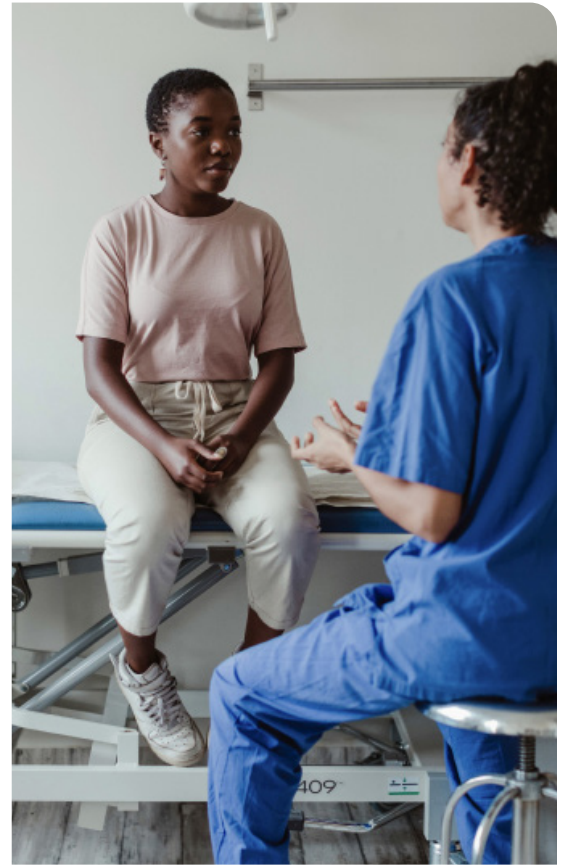


What Is Recurrent Pericarditis?

Recurrent pericarditis is when you develop pericarditis for a second time after having no symptoms for at least four weeks.

Pericarditis is inflammation of the pericardium, a sac-like organ with two thin layers of tissue that surround the heart. The pericardium holds the heart in place, protects it from infection and keeps it from filling with too much blood. It also cushions the heart from outside pressure. A small amount of fluid keeps the layers separate and decreases the friction between them as the heart beats. In some people with this condition, these tissues become swollen and irritated. This can cause sharp chest pain and may lead to fluid buildup around the heart that causes discomfort. In most cases, pericarditis is mild and gets better on its own without treatment.

Recurrent pericarditis occurs in 15% to 50% of people with pericarditis in the U.S. Pericarditis is most common in men 16 to 65 years old, but it can affect anybody at any age. About 5% of people seeking treatment in emergency departments for chest pain have acute pericarditis.



What are the symptoms of recurrent pericarditis?

- Chest pain is almost always present. It may feel like a sharp, stabbing pain that radiates to the arm, neck, shoulder, back or abdomen. Some people mistake the pain for a heart attack. The pain gets worse when coughing, taking deep breaths or lying down. The pain may improve by sitting up and leaning forward.
- Low-grade fever, chills or sweating
- Dry cough
- Heart palpitations or faster than normal heartbeat
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Swollen abdomen, legs or feet
- Low blood pressure with symptoms such as lightheadedness, dizziness or fainting

What causes recurrent pericarditis?

The cause of recurrent pericarditis is idiopathic, or unknown, in most patients. While there is no single cause, it often develops in people who don't get adequate treatment for pericarditis. Viral illness, such as herpes, influenza, adenovirus, enterovirus or Epstein Barr virus, may also cause recurrent pericarditis. Other potential causes include:

- Autoimmune conditions, such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), scleroderma and rheumatoid arthritis
- Complications from a heart attack or heart surgery
- Health problems such as kidney failure or cancer
- Bacterial, fungal and parasitic infections (most common in people with compromised immune systems)
- Radiation to the chest
- Chest trauma
- Certain medications

(continued)



What Is Recurrent Pericarditis?

How is recurrent pericarditis diagnosed?

If your doctor believes you may have recurrent pericarditis, they will listen to your heart for rubbing sounds that often occur in people with the condition. One or more of the following tests may be used to confirm the diagnosis:

- Blood tests
- Chest X-ray
- Electrocardiogram (EKG)
- Echocardiogram (echo)
- Cardiac CT (computed tomography) scan
- Cardiac MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)

How is recurrent pericarditis treated?

Recurrent pericarditis is usually treated with the anti-inflammatory drug colchicine and aspirin or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). If NSAIDs and colchicine don't lead to a complete resolution, low to moderate doses of corticosteroids such as prednisone may also be prescribed.

Because steroids have been linked with a higher risk of recurrence, they're typically used in people who don't respond to first-line treatments, can't tolerate NSAIDs or colchicine, are pregnant or have conditions such as autoimmune disease.

While such treatments are usually successful, immunosuppressants, anti-inflammatory and interleukin (IL-1) blockers may help control symptoms for people who don't respond otherwise.

Your doctor may perform a pericardiocentesis where excess fluid is drained from the pericardium. Or, as a last result, the pericardium may be removed partially (or entirely). This is called a pericardiectomy.

How do I manage recurrent pericarditis?

For most people, recurrent pericarditis can safely be managed at home.

While recurrent pericarditis can affect your quality of life, it generally doesn't lead to severe health problems. But in rare cases, it can lead to abnormal heart rhythm, a dangerous buildup of fluid around the heart (cardiac tamponade), heart failure and death.

Seek treatment if you have any continued symptoms of pericarditis.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit [heart.org](https://www.heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at [HeartInsight.org](https://www.heartinsight.org).
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/SupportNetwork](https://www.heart.org/SupportNetwork).

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

When should I call my doctor?

What may have caused my recurrent pericarditis?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/AnswersByHeart](https://www.heart.org/AnswersByHeart) to learn more.