

Pericarditis

What is pericarditis?

Pericarditis is a relatively common heart condition. Around 5% of all attendances to emergency departments for severe chest pain are due to pericarditis. Pericarditis is inflammation (swelling and irritation) of the pericardium, which is the fluid-filled sac that surrounds your heart. It is thought that most cases of acute pericarditis are the result of a viral infection.

The inflammation causes pain - typically sharp stabbing pain which may be worse when you lie down. You might also experience a mild fever or flu like illness, breathlessness and a dry cough. Most cases of pericarditis get better over the course of 1-3 weeks.

Types of pericarditis

There are three main types of pericarditis:

- **acute pericarditis** - where the symptoms do not last longer than three months (with treatment, symptoms normally resolve within a week)
- **recurring pericarditis** - where someone has repeated episodes of acute pericarditis - this can happen in up to 1 in 4 cases
- **chronic pericarditis** - where the symptoms last longer than three months

How is pericarditis treated?

Usually pericarditis can be treated without you being admitted to hospital. You will be given anti-inflammatory medicine such as ibuprofen to help with pain and to shorten the course of the illness.

You may also be given a medicine called colchicine. This is used to try to prevent recurrent pericarditis, but can interact with other medicines. Be sure to tell the doctor if you are already taking other medications.

Are there any complications from pericarditis?

In many cases of pericarditis a small amount of fluid builds up between the two layers of the pericardium. This is called a pericardial effusion. A small amount of fluid is no problem and usually goes when the inflammation settles. However, sometimes a lot of fluid builds up and can press on the heart. This can prevent the heart chambers from filling normally, and prevents the heart from pumping blood properly.

Much less commonly the pericardium becomes thickened and contracts around the heart. This tends only to happen if the inflammation has continued for a long time. It is a serious condition as it can interfere with the function of the heart.

With both of the above complications, symptoms include shortness of breath which gets worse and worse.

What happens next?

The cardiac nurses will contact you by telephone in the next few days to check how you are getting on. They will be able to give you further advice if you have any questions. You should avoid strenuous exercise until the symptoms have resolved or advised by your doctor.

Will I need to see a doctor again?

Please return to the Emergency Department if your pain is not adequately controlled by the medicines you have been given, if you are becoming increasingly short of breath, or if you have palpitations (are aware of your heart racing or pounding).

If your symptoms continue for more than a week please see your GP, who may well suggest that you are referred to a cardiologist for further follow up.

Further information and advice is available from:

Emergency Department
Worcestershire Royal Hospital
Charles Hastings Way
Newtown Road
Worcester
WR5 1DD

Tel. no. 01905 733065 Hospital switchboard 01905 763333

NHS Direct Tel. 0845 4647

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that you may need to leave a voicemail message, but we aim to return your call within one working day. If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.

For additional medical advice, if your symptoms or condition worsens:

Contact your GP

NHS 111:

Get help with your symptoms, NHS111:
Information to help you manage your health:

Telephone 111

<https://111.nhs.uk/>
www.nhs.uk

In an emergency telephone 999

Emergency Department (A&E)
Alexandra Hospital
Woodrow Drive
Redditch B98 7UB

Tel: 01527 512030

Minor Injury Unit
Kidderminster Hospital
Bewdley Road
Kidderminster DY11 6RJ

Tel: 01562 513039

Emergency Department (A&E)
Worcestershire Royal Hospital
Charles Hastings Way
Worcester WR5 1DD

Tel: 01905 760743