Pericarditis

Pericarditis is an inflammation of the sac that surrounds the heart. This sac is known as the pericardium. Typically the pericardium contains a smooth lubricating lining. When you have pericarditis, the lining is more like sandpaper.

SYMPTOMS

- Sharp chest pain under the breast bone (*sternum*).
- Pain may also be felt in the neck, back or arms.
- Pain may feel worse if you lean forward, take a deep breath, or lie down.
- Shortness of breath.
- Fever.
- Pain on swallowing.

CAUSES

- Viral or bacterial infections.
- Heart disease.
- Heart surgery.
- Reaction to a drug.
- Kidney failure.
- Thyroid problems.
- Arthritis.
- Cancer.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of pericarditis is based on your history,exam findings, and tests. These may include an EKG, chest x-ray, CT studies, blood tests, and echocardiogram.

TREATMENT

Treatment for pericarditis includes medicine for discomfort. An antibiotic may also be needed. With proper treatment, most episodes of pericarditis get better without complications.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Get plenty of rest.
- Avoid activities that increase your pain.
- Do not smoke or drink alcohol.
- Be sure to see your caregiver as recommended for follow-up to make sure your condition resolves completely.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Pain or shortness of breath that is getting worse.
- A high fever, severe abdominal or back pain.
- Marked weakness, fainting, or any other serious complaint.

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