

## CARDIOMYOPATHY

### What is it?

A Cardiomyopathy means that the heart muscle is weak. It occurs when the problem is primarily with the heart muscle rather than with blocked arteries as occurs with heart attacks. Cardiomyopathies can be classified in many forms but simply can be Dilated or Hypertrophic. In a Dilated Cardiomyopathy the heart is enlarged and weakened. Untreated, the weakening results in heart failure which produces shortness of breath, ankle swelling and lethargy.

### What causes it?

Generally the cause of dilated Cardiomyopathies remains unknown. It is thought that viral infections play a role in triggering this condition. It can occur after viral colds or even in relation to pregnancy. Often no precipitating event can be identified. Sometimes the heart can recover in function and this will be regularly assessed by echocardiographic tests.

### What are the risks?

The main risks are symptoms of shortness of breath and reduced energy or lethargy. Rarely the heart rhythm can become disturbed leading to dizziness or collapse. You should contact your Doctor if you have any of these symptoms. A potential reduction in life span can be improved by regular medication.

### How do you treat it?

Heart failure can now be well treated by tablets. **Diuretics** are fluid tablets which reduce the volume that the heart has to pump around. **ACE inhibitors** reduce the blood pressure and load on the heart; additionally they have been shown to improve survival in patient with Cardiomyopathy. **Digoxin** helps the heart to beat stronger. Beta blockers such as **Carvedilol**, **Bisoprolol** and **Metoprolol XL** can improve symptoms and survival in patients with more severe heart dysfunction. **Warfarin** is sometimes used to thin the blood and reduce the chance of blood congealing in the weakened heart, which can lead to strokes when the clot dislodges. Rarely patients who fail to respond to conventional medical treatment can become candidates for heart transplants. It is important that control of fluid intake is curtailed.

### Heart failure normally responds well to medication