

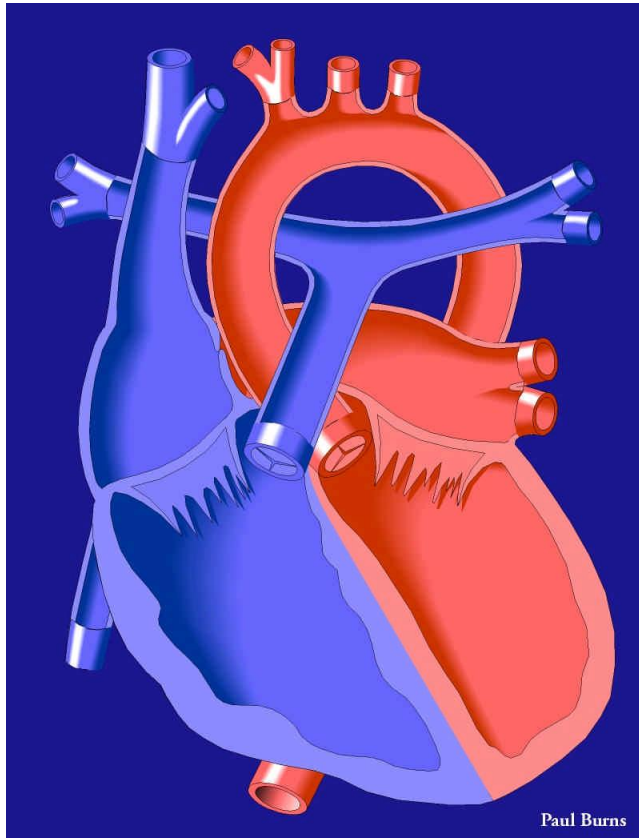
Dilated Cardiomyopathy



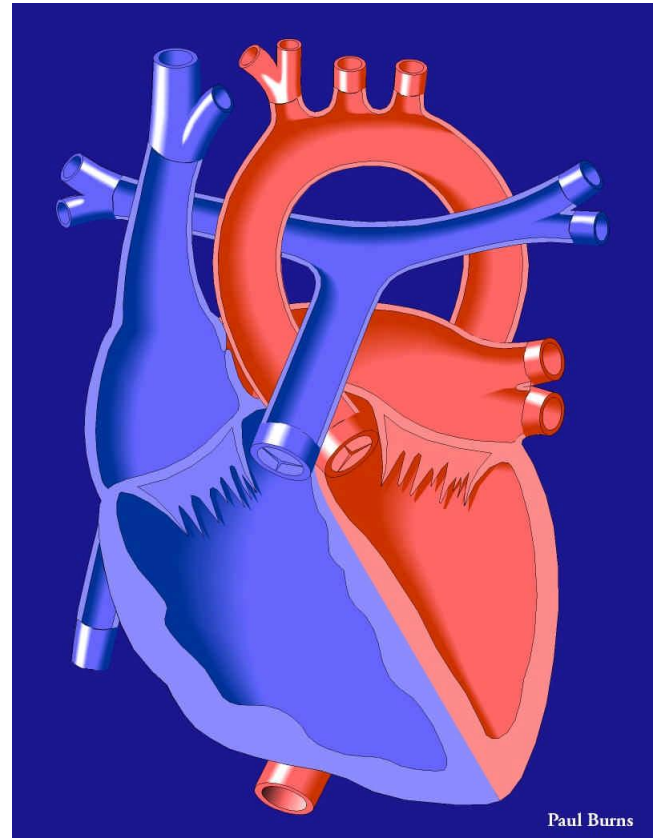
What Is It?

In this defect, the muscle wall of the left ventricle (the heart's main pumping chamber) is weaker than normal. As a result, the left ventricle may become enlarged (dilated) and the ability of the heart muscle to contract is impaired. There is also slight enlargement of the other heart chambers.

The cause of Dilated Cardiomyopathy (also known as Congestive Cardiomyopathy) is not known, though it sometimes results from a viral infection.



Dilated Cardiomyopathy



Normal Heart

What Are Its Effects?

The effects of Dilated Cardiomyopathy vary in seriousness depending on the degree of heart muscle weakness and dilatation. Fatigue, weakness, and shortness of breath are commonly experienced with physical exertion. There may also be difficulty breathing while lying down (orthopnea). There is a characteristic heart murmur and water retention (edema) is a frequently associated symptom. In many cases, there is improvement in the heart's performance over time.

Mildly affected individuals may require no treatment. For patients with more severe symptoms, medications may be prescribed to strengthen the pumping action of the heart by lowering the blood pressure in the arteries. This makes it easier for the left ventricle to do its job of pumping blood to the body tissues.

Water pills (diuretics) may also be helpful in reducing the fluid retention.

In cases where the weakness of the heart muscle is severe, a heart transplant may be performed.

