

COR PULMONALE

An Overview

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IMPORTANT

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Introduction

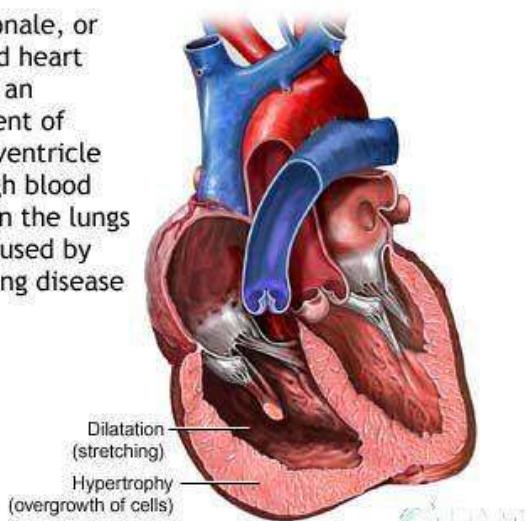
Cor Pulmonale is an abnormal condition of the heart, which is marked by swelling of the right lower chamber (ventricle) of the heart. This results from high blood pressure (hypertension) of the lung circulation. Long-term cor pulmonale increases the size of the right ventricle because it cannot adjust to a rise in pressure as easily as the left ventricle. However, in some individuals, the disease also increases the size of the left ventricle.

(Picture right - Cor Pulmonale

Some of the diseases linked to cor pulmonale are cystic fibrosis, myasthenia gravis, heart disease, and swelling of the lung arteries (pulmonary arteritis). Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and emphysema are others. Cor pulmonale accounts for about 25% of all types of heart failure.

The disease affects middle-aged and elderly men more than women. Moreover, it may occur in children linked with cystic fibrosis, hemosiderosis, scleroderma, nervous system diseases affecting lung muscles, or disorders of the breathing control centre in the brain.

Cor pulmonale, or right-sided heart failure, is an enlargement of the right ventricle due to high blood pressure in the lungs usually caused by chronic lung disease

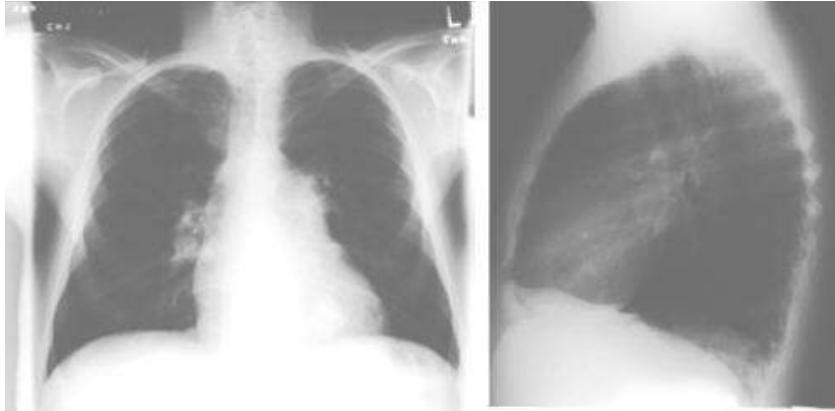


Diagnosis

Some of the early signs of cor pulmonale include a constant cough, difficulty with breathing, fatigue, and weakness. As the disease progresses, breathing difficulties may become more severe.

(Picture right - Cor Pulmonale in consequence of pulmonary hypertension)

Signs of cor pulmonale include water retention, swollen neck veins, and rapid heartbeat. A weak pulse and low blood pressure may result from decreased heart function. The individual may in turn be awake or be drowsy.



Treatment

Treatment tries to increase oxygen, increase exercise tolerance, and correct the defect if possible. The result is usually poor, however. This is because cor pulmonale is typically the result of an incurable disease (e.g. chronic obstructive pulmonary disease). Treatment includes bed rest, digitalis, drugs to fight lung infection, oxygen, low-salt diet, a small amount of fluids, diuretics, and anti-clotting drugs.

General

Treatment of cor pulmonale requires a very careful diet of many small meals. The amount of fluids drunk daily must be limited. Digitalis poisoning is often a danger, and the individual must be alert to the symptoms. These include appetite loss, nausea, vomiting, and seeing yellow halos around images. The cor pulmonale patient must avoid mixing with crowds and taking drugs that can harm breathing (e.g. sedatives).

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