



British Heart
Foundation

Atrial Myxoma

What is an atrial myxoma?

An atrial myxoma is a very rare type of heart tumor that is found in one of the top chambers of the heart (the atria). Around three quarters of atrial myxomas occur in the left atria, and tend to grow on the wall (septum) that separates the right and left sides of the heart. They are 'benign', which means they do not spread around the rest of the body like other cancerous tumors. However, because they can grow quite large, they can interfere with how the heart works causing problems with the pumping action of the heart muscle and abnormal heart rhythms.

Sometimes small pieces of the tumor can break off and fall into the blood stream. If this happens, they can block an artery elsewhere in the body such as the brain, which could cause a stroke, or in the lungs causing a pulmonary embolus.

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What causes it?

Around 10% of myxomas seem to be inherited (passed down through families). These are known as familial myxomas. They tend to occur in more than one part of the heart at a time, and often cause symptoms at a younger age than other myxomas.

Atrial myxomas tend to be more common in women, and are sometimes associated with heart valve disease and the abnormal heart rhythm atrial fibrillation.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms will vary depending on the size and position of the myxoma. They may include:

- a high temperature
- a cough
- breathlessness and/or difficulty breathing when lying flat
- palpitations
- dizziness and even fainting
- weight loss
- tiredness
- chest pain or discomfort
- a blueness to the skin, especially the fingers (Raynaud's phenomenon),
- swelling on any part of the body.

Heart Helpline

Our cardiac nurses and information support officers are here to answer your questions and give you all the heart health information and support you need.

Call us on 0300 330 3311

**Similar cost to 01 or 02 numbers.
Lines are open 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday.**

This information does not replace the advice that your doctor or nurse may give you. If you are worried about your heart health in any way, contact your GP or local healthcare provider.

What tests will I need?

Your doctor may hear extra or unusual sounds whilst listening to your chest with a stethoscope – these are known as heart murmurs. The sounds may also change if you change position, for example if you are lying down and your doctor asks you to sit up. You will usually be asked to have an ECG (electrocardiogram), and possibly a chest x-ray and echocardiogram (an ultrasound of your heart) at your local hospital. You may also need to have some other types of imaging tests carried out, such as a CT scan or MRI.

Will I need treatment?

Any symptoms that you have can normally be controlled with medicines. However, most atrial myxomas need to be removed during open heart surgery and any problems with the heart valves can usually be solved at the same time. Once the myxoma has been removed, your symptoms should disappear.

Heart surgery normally means that you are cured, however, in a very small number of cases they can reoccur.