

# Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy (Broken Heart Syndrome)

Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke  
Scotland



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Other names for takotsubo cardiomyopathy include:

**Broken heart syndrome**

**Apical ballooning**

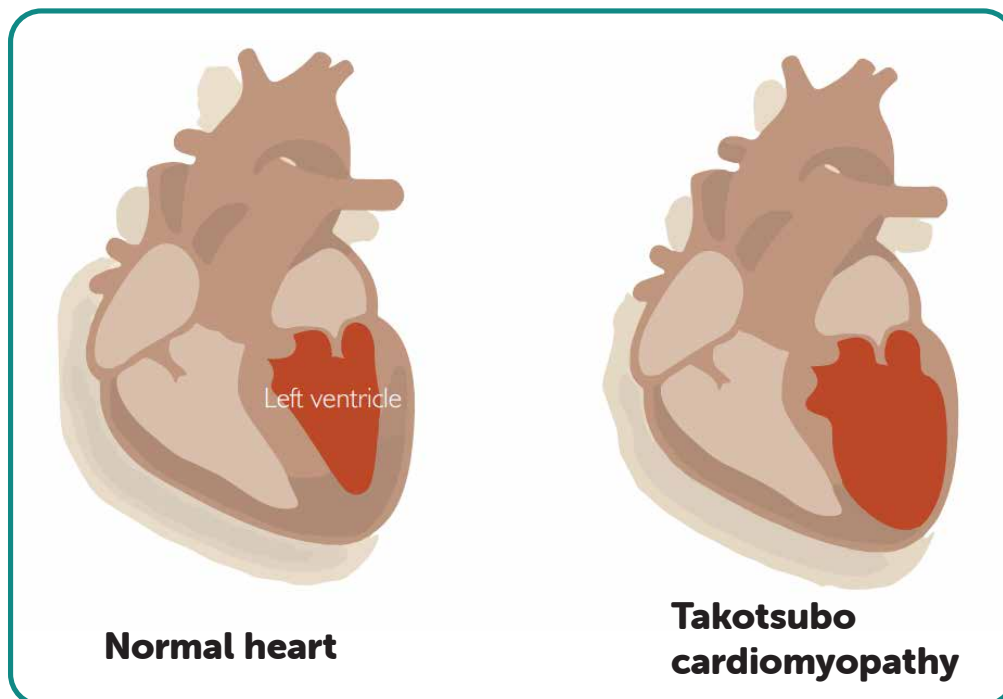
**Acute stress-induced cardiomyopathy**

## Key Points

- Takotsubo cardiomyopathy is a short-term heart condition which happens in response to extreme physical or emotional stress.
- Takotsubo cardiomyopathy has similar symptoms to a heart attack, but it is not a heart attack, and it usually resolves itself. Although complications are possible, takotsubo cardiomyopathy is usually not fatal and does not usually cause severe long-term effects.
- You will be observed for 24-48 hours following a takotsubo attack, to catch any complications early.
- Around one in 20 people who have had a takotsubo incident will have another at some point, so it is important to manage stress as much as possible after a takotsubo incident.

## What is takotsubo cardiomyopathy?

Takotsubo cardiomyopathy is a condition where the left ventricle “balloons” out in response to stress. The left ventricle is the part of your heart that pumps blood to the rest of your body. This is shown below.



This makes your heart weaker, and not enough blood can get to the rest of your body.

However, these changes usually reverse themselves fairly quickly and normal heart function should return. The changes may last for a few weeks, or only for a few hours.

## Why is it called takotsubo cardiomyopathy?

The term “takotsubo cardiomyopathy” was coined in the 1990s by the Japanese researchers who first recognised the condition.

**Takotsubo** is the Japanese word for a kind of fishing trap used to catch octopuses. In takotsubo syndrome, the left ventricle narrows towards the top, look larger and rounder at the bottom like a takotsubo pot.

**Cardiomyopathy** is a technical term for damage (temporary or permanent) to the muscles of the heart.

## What does it feel like?

Takotsubo cardiomyopathy often has similar symptoms to a heart attack. This might include:

- Chest pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Breathlessness or shortness of breath
- An unusually fast, slow, or irregular heartbeat

As these can also be heart attack symptoms, if you experience any of them, you should **call 999 immediately and ask for an ambulance.**

## How is it diagnosed?

Takotsubo cardiomyopathy is usually diagnosed after you have arrived to hospital following possible heart attack symptoms. First, you will have a blood test to check for chemicals in your blood caused by heart damage, like troponin. This will confirm that you are not having a heart attack.

You may also have a combination of:

- A coronary angiogram - looks at how your blood flows through the coronary arteries to see if there is a blockage.
- An ECG - this will check your heart rate and rhythm.
- An echocardiogram - to see if the shape of your heart has changed. In takotsubo your left ventricle will look ballooned and enlarged.
- An MRI scan - for more detailed images of your heart.

You may also be asked whether there have been any recent stresses in your life which might have triggered a takotsubo event.

## What causes takotsubo cardiomyopathy?

Doctors currently believe that takotsubo cardiomyopathy is caused when our bodies respond strongly to a stressful trigger. This trigger could be physical or psychological.

The amount of time between the stress trigger and the takotsubo episode can vary from seconds to weeks or even months.

It is not known exactly how this stress causes takotsubo changes in the heart. The most widely accepted theory is that, when a stressful event happens, the body releases excessive amounts of adrenaline and similar hormones, which 'stun' the heart.

### Common stress triggers

Around 1 in 3 cases of takotsubo are caused by a physical event. Physical triggers that might cause a takotsubo event might include:

- A severe illness.
- A physical assault or abuse, including sexual assault.
- An injury or accident.
- A recent surgery.

Around 1 in 4 cases are triggered by an emotional event, such as:

- Bereavement or grief.
- Divorce or the break-up of a long-term relationship.
- Financial worries or debt.
- Domestic or sexual abuse.
- Any other traumatic life event, like surviving a disaster or witnessing something terrible.

In around 3 out of 10 cases, no specific trigger can be identified.

## Who gets takotsubo cardiomyopathy?

Takotsubo cardiomyopathy does not seem to be inherited, and can happen to anyone. However, it is most common among women who are over 50, and who have been through the menopause. Almost 9 out of 10 cases of takotsubo cardiomyopathy happen in women.

Around 2% (one in 50) people who are hospitalised with acute cardiac symptoms turn out to have takotsubo cardiomyopathy.

# How is a takotsubo event managed?

Following a takotsubo cardiomyopathy your heart will usually return to normal on its own. However, as its symptoms are similar to a heart attack, it will probably be treated as such at first. This is because until a heart attack can be ruled out, it is better to be safe than sorry.

It is normal to keep someone in hospital for 24-48 hours after a takotsubo event, so that any complications can be treated immediately. You may be given:

- Medicines to help your heart muscle recover.
- Supportive treatments, such as fluid removal to help with breathlessness.
- Mechanical devices to help your heart to pump better.

## What kind of complications are possible?

Takotsubo cardiomyopathy can cause complications like: low blood pressure, a risk of blood clots which might cause a stroke or heart attack, or arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms). These complications are very rare, and can usually be avoided by treating the symptoms early and effectively. This makes it very important to follow your doctor's advice and report any new symptoms.

## What next?

After you are discharged, you will probably be asked to attend regular check-ups for a few months. This is to make sure that your heart function goes back to normal, and that no lasting damage shows up.

You may also want to see a counsellor or seek help for the stress in your life. This is particularly relevant if you think emotional stress might have contributed to your cardiac event.

## Will it happen again?

Having one takotsubo event does not necessarily mean you will have another. However, a small but significant number of people do experience another similar event. The best way to avoid this is to try and minimise stress wherever possible.

# Where else can I get more information and support?

## British Heart Foundation

A cardiovascular research charity in the UK that offers a wide range of information about cardiovascular conditions and risk factors.

Tel: **0808 802 1234 (9.00am–5pm, Mon–Fri)**

Email: [hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk](mailto:hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk)

Web: [www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport](http://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport)

## Cardiomyopathy UK

A UK-wide charity working to support people with all kinds of cardiomyopathy, including takotsubo.

Website: [www.cardiomyopathy.org](http://www.cardiomyopathy.org)

Tel: **0800 018 1024**

Email: [contact@cardiomyopathy.org](mailto:contact@cardiomyopathy.org)

## University of Aberdeen Cardiovascular & Diabetes Centre

The largest cardiovascular research centre in Scotland. If you have experienced a takotsubo event and want to get involved in research into the condition, they may be able to direct you.

Website: [www.abdn.ac.uk/acdc](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/acdc)

Tel: **01224 559573**

Address: **Cardiac Research Office,  
Aberdeen,  
AB25 2ZN**

The National Institute of Health Research is collaborating with the University of Aberdeen until December 2028. [Information about the 'Establishing the Incidence of Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy in Scotland' study can be found on the Be Part of Research website.](#)

You might also want to seek mental health or trauma support through your GP or a charity such as Mind, SAMH, or Penumbra Mental Wellbeing.

If you think that a possible trigger of your takotsubo event might be related to sexual violence, help is available through Rape Crisis Scotland. You can call them on 08088 01 03 02.

# NO LIFE HALF LIVED

Contact our Advice Line for information and support:

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Text: **ADVICE** to **66777**

Email: **advice@chss.org.uk**

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You can also go to our website for information, advice and support: **www.chss.org.uk**

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