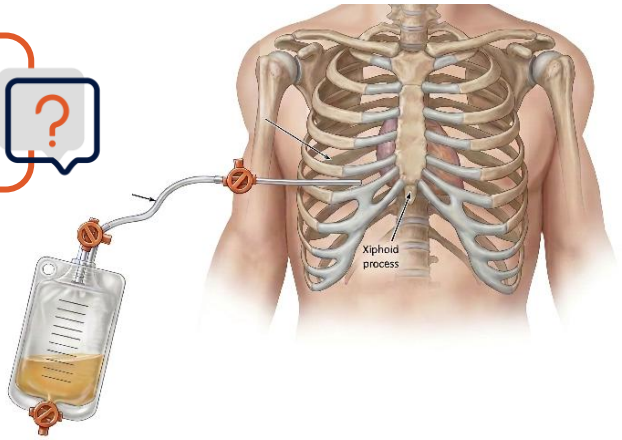
Pericardial Drains

Critical Care

Pericardial drains are flexible catheters that are sometimes placed into the pericardium following a pericardiocentesis or pericardial window. This allows for drainage of excess fluid to prevent complications such as infection and cardiac tamponade. Patients will return to unit with the drain, which will remain in place for hours or days, depending on fluid output.

What is a pericardial window?
Procedure done to remove a part of the pericardium to allow for drainage.



Indications:

- Large or recurrent pericardial effusions
- Treatment of cardiac tamponade
- Diagnostic testing of fluid

Always use sterile technique when handling drains and tubing.

Management

- Empty drainage container per order and facility policy
- Assess integrity of dressing
- Monitor drainage amount, color, and consistency
- Assess patency every hour, as ordered by the provider, or per facility policy

Complications

Patients with pericardial drains are at a higher risk of developing cardiac tamponade, a life-threatening emergency involving the accumulation of blood or fluid within the pericardial sac, resulting in impaired ventricular filling during diastole and decreased cardiac output.

Other complications can include infection and arrhythmias.

Signs and Symptoms of Cardiac Tamponade	
• JVD	• Dizziness
• Narrow pulse pressure	• Tachycardia
• Shortness of breath	• Hypotension
• Chest pain	• Muffled heart sounds

Check patency of drain and notify the provider immediately if your patient exhibits signs and symptoms of cardiac tamponade.

See back for additional guidance

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Restoring Patency

In some cases, flushing may be performed if the drain becomes occluded. This can be done with a prescribed medication or sterile saline.

In most facilities, flushing can only be done by a provider and/or appropriately trained and competent ICU nurses. Be sure you are aware of your facility's policy for who can perform flushing.

Additional Resources

Draining Pericardial Fluid Continuously

Draining Pericardial Fluid Intermittently

Managing a Pericardial Catheter

Restoring Patency to a Pericardial Drain

References

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