E CONF SERIES

International Conference on Educational Discoveries and Humanities
Hosted online from Moscow, Russia
Website: econfseries.com 16th September, 2025

THE HUMAN HEART: ANATOMY, PHYSIOLOGY, AND PATHOPHYSIOLOGY

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Abstract

The human heart is a muscular organ that functions as the central pump of the circulatory system, delivering oxygenated blood to tissues and organs while removing metabolic waste. It consists of four chambers—two atria and two ventricles—separated by valves that ensure unidirectional blood flow. This thesis examines the detailed anatomy of the heart, its physiological mechanisms including the cardiac cycle and electrical conduction system, and common pathophysiological conditions such as coronary artery disease, heart failure, and arrhythmias. Understanding the heart's normal function and common disorders is essential for the development of effective diagnostic and therapeutic strategies.

Keywords: Heart, Cardiac Anatomy, Cardiac Physiology, Coronary Artery Disease, Heart Failure, Arrhythmias, Cardiac Cycle, Sinoatrial Node

Introduction

The heart plays a crucial role in maintaining homeostasis by ensuring continuous blood circulation throughout the body. Its structure is uniquely designed to support this function, with specialized tissues and mechanisms to maintain rhythmic contractions. Cardiovascular diseases remain the leading cause of mortality worldwide, making the study of the heart's anatomy and function indispensable in medical science.

Body

1. Anatomy of the Heart

The heart is located in the mediastinum of the thoracic cavity and weighs approximately 250-350 grams in adults. It has four chambers: the right atrium and ventricle, which handle deoxygenated blood, and the left atrium and ventricle, which

pump oxygen-rich blood to systemic circulation. The heart valves—tricuspid, pulmonary, mitral, and aortic—prevent backflow and maintain efficiency. The myocardium, composed of cardiac muscle cells, enables powerful contractions.

2. Physiology of the Heart

The cardiac cycle consists of systole (contraction) and diastole (relaxation) phases. Electrical impulses originate in the sinoatrial (SA) node, travel through the atrioventricular (AV) node, and propagate along the His-Purkinje system, coordinating myocardial contraction. This system ensures effective pumping and maintenance of blood pressure.

3. Pathophysiology

Cardiovascular diseases, such as coronary artery disease (CAD), arise due to plaque buildup in coronary arteries, leading to ischemia and myocardial infarction. Heart failure results from the heart's inability to pump sufficient blood, causing symptoms such as dyspnea and edema. Arrhythmias occur due to abnormalities in the electrical conduction system, which can be life-threatening if untreated.

4. Clinical Importance

Early diagnosis and treatment of heart diseases rely on understanding normal and abnormal cardiac function. Advances in imaging, pharmacology, and surgical techniques have improved patient outcomes. Preventive measures like lifestyle changes and controlling risk factors are vital to reduce cardiovascular morbidity.

Conclusion

The heart’s complex structure and function underscore its essential role in human physiology. Knowledge of cardiac anatomy, physiology, and pathology is fundamental for healthcare professionals to effectively diagnose, manage, and treat cardiovascular conditions, which remain a major global health challenge.

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