

Heart Conditions: An Overview

What are heart conditions?

- Children have very different kinds of heart disease than adults. Here is an overview of the categories of heart defects that children have.
 - **Congenital heart defects:** These defects are structural heart defects that children are born with. They can be very serious and require surgery immediately, or they can be less serious and just need to be watched over time.
 - **Rhythm problems:** The heart can beat too fast, too slow, or too irregularly. This problem can be isolated, or it can be related to other heart disease.
 - **Myocarditis:** This is a general term for inflammation of the heart. Children can get myocarditis from viral infections and diseases such as Kawasaki disease.
 - **Pericarditis:** Pericarditis is an inflammation of the lining surrounding the heart, which can cause fluid accumulation around the heart. This inflammation can be caused by an infection or another irritant.
 - **Cardiomyopathy:** This is a term for an abnormal heart muscle. It can be caused by a viral infection or a chemical, or it can happen for unknown reasons. Because it can be caused by many different things, it can often be hard to predict how serious it will be or how long it will last. Children may fall anywhere on the spectrum of recovering completely to needing a heart transplant.
 - **Valvular heart disease:** The heart has valves that allow the blood to pass from one area to another. Leakage or blockage of those valves can cause heart problems.
- Other important terms include
 - **Heart murmur:** A heart murmur is a sound that the blood makes as it flows through the heart. Often, this murmur causes no problems at all. Just like snoring is caused by air going through narrow passages, the blood can be noisy as it travels but can pass through without harm. These murmurs are called *functional*, *innocent*, and *benign* murmurs. Sometimes, a heart murmur is a clue that there is a more serious heart problem.
 - **Cyanosis:** This term refers to a blue color of the skin that develops when the blood does not contain a normal amount of oxygen.
 - **Heart failure:** When the heart fails, it means that it cannot keep up with the workload and it falls behind. Heart failure does not mean that the heart stops; it just means that it cannot pump blood as efficiently as it needs to.
- For this book, we divided heart conditions into 2 groups.
 - *Nonstructural* heart conditions, that is, problems with the functioning of the heart caused by infection or another medical issue that develops after birth
 - *Structural* heart defects, that is, problems with the structure of the heart that are usually present at birth
- Children with congenital heart defects can have problems with their heart functioning caused by the original heart problem, results of the surgical repair, or their medications.
- Children with congenital heart defects are more likely to enter a child care program or school with the diagnosis. Nonstructural heart conditions can be present before the child enrolls or can develop while the child is attending the program.
- Sometimes, children with heart problems have other conditions such as Down syndrome, Marfan syndrome, and Noonan syndrome. Those conditions can cause challenges other than the heart problem.

What are some related Quick Reference Sheets?

- Heart Conditions, Nonstructural (page 139)
- Heart Defects, Structural (page 143)

