

What is a heart murmur?

Blood normally flows smoothly through the heart. If there is any disturbance in the flow of blood through the heart, it makes a 'swishing' or 'whooshing' noise. This unusual sound is heard when listening to a heart with a stethoscope and is called a heart murmur.

Types of murmur

Heart murmurs are common in babies and young children. Most murmurs are harmless and will not need treatment. Doctors call these functional or innocent murmurs.

Some heart murmurs show that a child has a heart condition. If a doctor thinks your child may have a heart condition, they will refer you to a cardiologist for more tests.

Tests

The cardiologist will examine your child thoroughly and do some tests. Tests can include:

- **Weighing your child;**
- **An echocardiogram – an ultrasound scan to see how the blood is moving through the heart;**
- **An electrocardiogram (ECG) – to check the electrical activity of the heart;**
- **A SATs test (oxygen saturation test) – to check the amount of oxygen in your child's blood;**
- **A chest x-ray – to look at the position of the organs in the chest.**

Symptoms

The cardiologist will also be looking for other symptoms of a heart condition. These can include:

- **A bluish tint to the skin;**
- **Shortness of breath;**
- **Tiring quickly; and**
- **Dizziness or fainting.**

The cardiologist will probably ask you questions about your child's feeding and sleeping habits. Sometimes the cardiologist may want to monitor your child or do further tests. In this case, your child may need to stay in hospital.

Take Someone With You

It is often helpful to have a partner, friend or relative with you when you see the cardiologist; especially if they're taking notes or thinking of questions.

Talking to the Cardiologist

The cardiologist should explain exactly what is causing the murmur. If the murmur is caused by a heart condition, the cardiologist should:

- **Describe what is wrong with your child's heart;**
- **Tell you the name of the heart condition; and**
- **Tell you what treatment your child may need.**

Questions to Ask

You can ask the cardiologist any questions you have. Some questions you may want to ask are shown below.

- **Will my child need an operation?**
- **Where is the best place for my child to be treated?**
- **Where can I get more information and support?**

Finding out that your child has a heart condition can be very upsetting and it can be hard to take everything in. If you think of more questions after the appointment, you can book another appointment or contact the cardiologist by phone or email.

Before you Leave

Before you leave the appointment, make sure of the following:

- **Check that you will be receiving a detailed letter about the appointment (a copy of this letter should also be sent to your GP).**
- **Write down names of the people you have met and their contact details.**
- **Write down the name of the heart condition (or the condition which is suspected).**
- **You may want to ask the cardiologist to draw a diagram to help you understand what is wrong with your child's heart.**

If you need any further information please contact your cardiologist or clinical nurse specialist.

Evidence and sources of information:

(1) National Institute for Health & Care Excellence. Structural heart defects. London: NICE; 2017. Available at: <https://pathways.nice.org.uk/pathways/structural-heart-defects>

(2) Great Ormond Street Hospital. Heart Murmurs (innocent). London: GOSH; 2017. Available at: www.gosh.nhs.uk/medical-information-0/search-medical-conditions/heart-murmurs-innocent

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