

Adult Congenital Cardiac Service

EXERCISE AND YOUR HEART:

A Guide for Congenital Heart Patients

Exercise is usually good for the heart, even if you have a congenital heart condition.

This guide helps to explain what you should and shouldn't do, and how we can help.

Advice about exercise with heart conditions has changed in recent years. Although in the past you may have been told to avoid exercise, we now realise that gentle exercise is beneficial for most people with congenital heart conditions. Regular exercise can often help you feel better and help make your heart stronger.

 Different heart conditions have different implications for what exercise you should and shouldn't do. You should always talk to your cardiologist – he or she will be able to advise you about which types of exercise are suitable for someone with your particular heart condition.

 Moderate exercise is good for the heart. It helps to make the heart muscle stronger and to make the body muscles better at extracting oxygen from the blood stream. Exception: Contact sports as they may harm your health, especially when you are taking Warfarin.

 Regular moderate exercise will help you feel better and will make you fitter. Patients are often surprised by the difference regular exercise can make to how they feel.

 Some of the best forms of exercise involve steady activity performed over ½ hour, 3 or 4 times a week. Good forms of exercise are:

- Walking
- Jogging
- Swimming
- Cycling

Different patients will be able to do different amounts of exercise. Start gentle and build up slowly. If you are worried or unsure about exercising, we can give you advice about what is a good starting point for you.

 Some individual or team sports are fine for patients with congenital heart conditions. However, for some patients we may recommend that you avoid competitive sports or running long distances. Ask your cardiologist for advice about doing sport with your particular heart condition.

 Lifting heavy weights or playing sports that involve sudden bursts of energy (eg. Squash) may be inadvisable for some patients, particularly those with Marfan or Eisenmenger Syndrome. Talk to your cardiologist if you want to take part in these sports.

 Going to the gym is fine for many congenital heart patients. The “cardio” machines (treadmill, bike, stepper etc) are particularly suitable. You may find that some gyms are not keen to let you join up because of your heart condition - we can write a letter for you, which will sometimes help.

FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE OR QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:

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