

What About My Child and Rheumatic Fever?

Rheumatic fever is an inflammatory reaction that can occur after a streptococcal infection of the throat (“strep throat”). Most strep throat infections don’t lead to rheumatic fever. When they do, the time between the strep throat and rheumatic fever is about two to four weeks. Rheumatic fever is not contagious; however, the strep infection that comes before it is. If a strep throat infection is treated, rheumatic fever can almost always be prevented. Anyone can get rheumatic fever, but those who do are often 5 to 15 years old.



What are the common symptoms of rheumatic fever?

- Sudden onset of a sore throat, especially with painful swallowing
- Fever
- Tender, swollen glands under the jaw angle

The symptoms may be mild in some children. If your child has a sore throat, you can’t know for sure if it’s strep throat unless you take him or her to a doctor.

How does rheumatic fever affect the body?

It may affect many parts of the body. It can affect the heart and produce inflamed or scarred heart valves. It can also cause painful, swollen joints; skin rash, especially on the chest or abdomen; abnormal movements; or bumps under the skin.

Does rheumatic fever always affect the heart?

No. When it does, the damage may either disappear or remain. When rheumatic fever causes permanent heart damage, it’s called rheumatic heart disease.

Is there a cure for rheumatic fever?

There’s no “miracle drug” to cure it. An attack of rheumatic fever usually subsides within a few weeks to a few months, but heart damage may last for life. That’s why prevention is so important.

If my child has had rheumatic fever, must I restrict his or her activities?

Most children don’t need to have their activities restricted after the acute stage of this illness. But talk to your doctor because the answer varies from child to child.

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Can you get rheumatic fever more than once?

Yes. Your child is much more likely than others to have another “attack.” Taking an antibiotic (usually penicillin) regularly for many years can prevent most recurrences. The antibiotic prevents strep throat and protects the patient from getting rheumatic fever again.

If my child has rheumatic heart disease, how can I protect him or her from more problems?

People with rheumatic heart disease are at risk of developing an infection on their damaged heart valves. This infection is called “bacterial endocarditis” or “infective endocarditis.” You can help reduce the risk for this problem by keeping teeth clean and cavities filled. In the past, the American Heart Association recommended that people with rheumatic heart disease take a dose of antibiotics before certain dental or surgical procedures. However, our association does not suggest this type of preventive treatment any longer for people with rheumatic heart disease unless they



Keeping your child’s teeth clean and cavities filled can help prevent infective endocarditis.

have a history of endocarditis, an artificial heart valve, certain congenital heart defects, or have had a heart transplant and have heart valve problems.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals.** If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It’s very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
- 2 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease.
- 3** For information on stroke, call **1-888-4-STROKE** (1-888-478-7653) or visit us at StrokeAssociation.org.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

What can I do to protect my child from rheumatic fever?

My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/answersbyheart to learn more.

Knowledge is power, so Learn and Live!

