

Self-Care Tips for CHD Patients



This information is intended to assist in meaningful discussions between you and your doctor or dentist. This information should not be a substitute or replacement for talking to your doctor and dentist. Always talk to your heart doctor about symptoms, risks, diagnosis, and treatment.

**Adult
Congenital
Heart 
Association**

1 in 100

infants born each
year with CHD^{1,2}



Congenital heart disease

Congenital heart disease (CHD) is the most common birth defect. It affects almost 1% of babies born each year.^{1,2} CHD is heart disease that is present at birth. Most heart defects are caused by the heart not developing the way it should very early in pregnancy. Large blood vessels connected to the heart, such as the pulmonary artery that takes blood from the heart to the lungs, can also be affected. There are many different types of CHD. Today there are more than 2 million CHD patients in the United States. The majority are adults.

CHD and replacement heart valves

If your doctor suggested you read this, you may have been born with a heart condition affecting one or more heart valves. You may also have an artificial heart valve. The valve may have been implanted by open-heart surgery or through a catheter. Many CHD patients have multiple operations related to their heart valves.

What is endocarditis?

Infective endocarditis (IE)* is an infection of the inner lining of your heart's chamber or valves. It is caused by bacteria that entered your bloodstream. Bacteria can enter your bloodstream from several sources. The most common are:

- Skin sores
- Small cuts in your mouth

If left untreated, it can be deadly.

Am I at risk?

Certain people are at higher risk for endocarditis. Some reasons include³:

- Congenital heart disease
- Artificial heart valves (both surgical and transcatheter)
- History of endocarditis
- IV drug use
- Weakened immune system

*Also referred to as subacute bacterial endocarditis (SBE).



What are the symptoms?

Recognize common symptoms of endocarditis:

- Fevers or chills that last five days or more
- Poor appetite or unexplained weight loss
- Unusual amount of tiredness
- Aching joints and muscles
- Night sweats
- Shortness of breath

What should I do if I suspect I have endocarditis?*

Call your cardiologist or go to an emergency room as soon as possible.

- Explain that you have a heart defect, have had heart surgery, or have an artificial heart valve and have a higher risk of endocarditis.
- Your doctor will probably order a blood test before you are given antibiotics.
- If you go to the emergency room, ask them to call your cardiologist.

Receive antibiotics

Your doctor will probably prescribe antibiotics specific to the bacteria found in the blood test.

*This information is provided as an educational resource based on an identified need, but is not intended to constitute medical advice or in any way replace the independent medical judgment of a trained and licensed physician with respect to patient needs or circumstances. The physician is solely responsible for all decisions and medical judgments relating to the treatment of their patients.

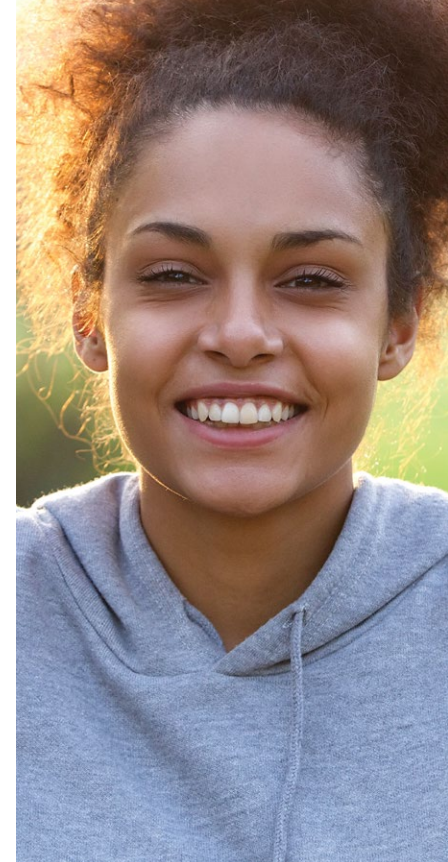
How can I protect my heart to reduce the risk of infection?

It is important to take care of your body. It can reduce your risk of endocarditis. Here are a few areas where good self-care can help reduce that risk:

- Practice good dental care.
- Practice good personal hygiene.
- Tell your other doctors (such as dentist, orthodontist, gastroenterologist) if you have an artificial heart valve. Ask your cardiologist whether antibiotics should be taken before any procedures.
- Avoid biting, tearing, or picking fingernails or toenails.
- Avoid tattoos and piercings. Consult with your doctor before considering these.
- Avoid illegal IV drug use.
- Avoid picking or scratching skin lesions such as acne, moles, or scabs.
- Use caution with animals or pets to avoid skin scratches.
- Seek immediate care for skin wounds to avoid infection.

A healthy mouth is good prevention*⁴

Maintain good oral health. It is one of the best ways to help reduce your risk of endocarditis. Your heart doctor may recommend you take prophylactic (preventative) antibiotics prior to your dental visit, even for routine cleanings, if you have an artificial valve — or if they believe you are at higher risk of infection because of your heart condition.



Practice good personal hygiene/ self-care, and maintain good oral health

Simple Tips for a Healthy Mouth*4

BRUSH TWICE A DAY

- Best after meals
- Gently brush all sides of your teeth with a soft-bristled brush
- Brush along gum line
- Brush with round and short back-and-forth strokes
- Lightly brush your tongue

FLOSS TEETH AT LEAST ONCE A DAY AND RINSE WITH AN ANTISEPTIC MOUTHWASH



SEE YOUR DENTIST AS SOON AS POSSIBLE IF YOU HAVE:

- Gums that bleed often
- Red or white patches on your gums, tongue, floor of mouth
- Mouth/jaw pain
- Sores that do not heal
- Problems swallowing or chewing

CHANGE YOUR TOOTHBRUSH EVERY 3 MONTHS

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YOUR OVERALL HEALTH AFFECTS YOUR MOUTH

- Eat healthy meals; limit soda.
 - Even diet soda can erode tooth enamel.
- Avoid snacking on sugary or starchy foods between meals.
- Eating fiber-rich fruits and vegetables causes you to make saliva. This benefits the protective enamel coating on your teeth.

HAVE REGULAR DENTAL CHECKUPS

Talk to your cardiologist about taking antibiotics before going to the dentist.



Congenital heart disease and dental care

Always talk with your cardiologist before dental visits:

- Ask whether you need antibiotics before you have any dental work or routine cleaning.
- Visit the American Dental Association for additional information on oral hygiene at www.ada.org.
- Visit the American Heart Association for additional information about infective endocarditis at www.heart.org/en/health-topics/infective-endocarditis.

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References

- ¹ Hoffman JL, Kaplan S. The incidence of congenital heart disease. *J Am Coll Cardiol.* June 19, 2002;39(12):1890-1900.
- ² Reller MD, Strickland MJ, Riehle-Colarusso T, Mahle WT, Correa A. Prevalence of congenital heart defects in Atlanta, 1998-2005. *J Pediatr.* December 2008;153(6):807-813.
- ³ McElhinney DB. Reflection and Rationalization: Making Sense of the Literature on Endocarditis after Transcatheter Pulmonary Valve Replacement. *Circ Cardiovasc Interv.* February 2017;10(2).
- ⁴ Pearson D. Why Is Dental Care So Important if You Have Congenital Heart Disease? Adult Congenital Heart Association. Webinar presented January 29, 2018. <https://www.achaheart.org/your-heart/living-with-chd/webinars>. Accessed September 24, 2018.

Website: www.achaheart.org/your-heart/health-information/achd-and-dental-issues/

PDF: www.achaheart.org/media/1201/dental.pdf

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