

Rheumatic Heart Disease/Rheumatic Fever

What is rheumatic heart disease?

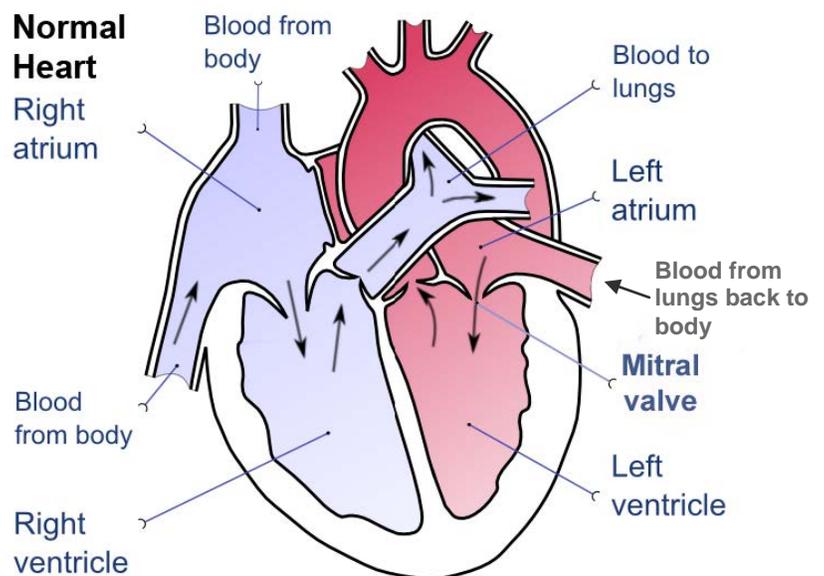
Rheumatic heart disease is damage to the heart valves caused by rheumatic fever. It most often affects the mitral valve.

Rheumatic fever starts with a strep throat caused by bacteria. It can harm the heart, brain, joints, or skin through swelling. It is seen most often in children 6 to 15 years old. It sometimes occurs when strep throat is not treated with antibiotics. It is more common when there is a family history of rheumatic fever.

What are the symptoms of strep throat?

- A sudden sore throat.
- Pain when swallowing.
- Fever, often 101°-104°F (38.33°- 40°C).
- Headache.
- Red throat or tonsils.
- Stomach pain, nausea and vomiting.

Strep throat can be very mild and have few symptoms. Sore throats are more often caused by viruses than by a strep infection. Viral throat infections cannot be treated with antibiotics. They do not cause rheumatic fever.



What are the symptoms of rheumatic fever?

Symptoms normally appear about three weeks after the strep throat. Symptoms may include:

- Fever.
- Painful, tender, red, or swollen joints.
- Pain that moves from one joint to another.
- Skipped heart beats.
- Chest pain.
- Shortness of breath.
- Skin rashes.
- Less energy or feeling tired.
- Small bumps under the skin that do not hurt.

Can it be prevented?

Most often, when doctors treat strep throat with antibiotics, it prevents rheumatic fever. **It is very important to take all of the antibiotics** that are ordered.

What tests will be done?

Rheumatic fever does not always affect the heart, but your doctor may have your child see a pediatric heart doctor called a cardiologist. These tests may be ordered:

- **Blood work** to look for signs of a bacterial infection.
- **An EKG (electrocardiogram)**. The EKG records the electrical activity of the heart.
- **An echo (echocardiogram)**. This test looks for defects in the heart's structure and other problems.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on when the rheumatic fever is diagnosed and how bad it is. If your child has not been treated for strep throat, antibiotics will be given. Your child may need bed rest.

Children who have had rheumatic fever are more likely to get it again. These children will need to take preventive antibiotic medicine for the rest of their life.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns, or if your child has special health care needs that this sheet did not cover.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.