

STRONG HEART



STRONG BODY

INFORMATION ABOUT: RHEUMATIC FEVER
& RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE

YOUR CLINIC/OTHER CONTACT PHONE NUMBERS:

RHD 
Program
Queensland

WHAT IS RHEUMATIC FEVER?

It is a sickness caused by streptococcal (strep) germs. This is the same germ that causes sore throats and skin sores. Sometimes after causing a sore throat the strep germ can affect the whole body, especially the big joints and the heart - this is called rheumatic fever.



Rheumatic fever is a sickness that can cause pains and swelling in the joints, mainly in the big joints like the knees, ankles, wrists and elbows. It can also cause hot and cold ‘fever’ and you may feel like you are getting the flu. Sometimes people are too sick to walk. Sometimes rheumatic fever affects the brain which will make parts of the body twitch and jerk. This is called ‘chorea’ (spoken as cor-e-ar).





The most important thing about rheumatic fever is that it can damage your heart. A Doctor may need to do a special heart scan (echo) to see if your heart has been damaged.



WHO CAN GET RHEUMATIC FEVER?

Rheumatic fever usually affects school-aged children but adults can also get it.

Because the strep germ (streptococcus) can come back again rheumatic fever can come back again too.



WHAT CAN I DO IF I THINK I HAVE RHEUMATIC FEVER?

If you have a sore throat, or fever and pains in your joints please go and see your Health Worker, Nurse or Doctor for a check-up.



HOW DO I STOP RHEUMATIC FEVER COMING BACK?

Having a penicillin needle every 4 weeks is the only good way to stop rheumatic fever happening again. The needle is given in the muscle of your bottom. Even though this may hurt a bit, it is very important you still have the needle – once every 4 weeks (this is every 28 days)! Remember rheumatic fever can be very serious for your heart.

WHY IS RHEUMATIC FEVER IMPORTANT?

Rheumatic fever can happen again and again. Each time it comes back the heart can get damaged, so the heart gets weaker and weaker, and it doesn't work properly. The valves inside the heart that keep the blood moving in the right direction get especially sick.

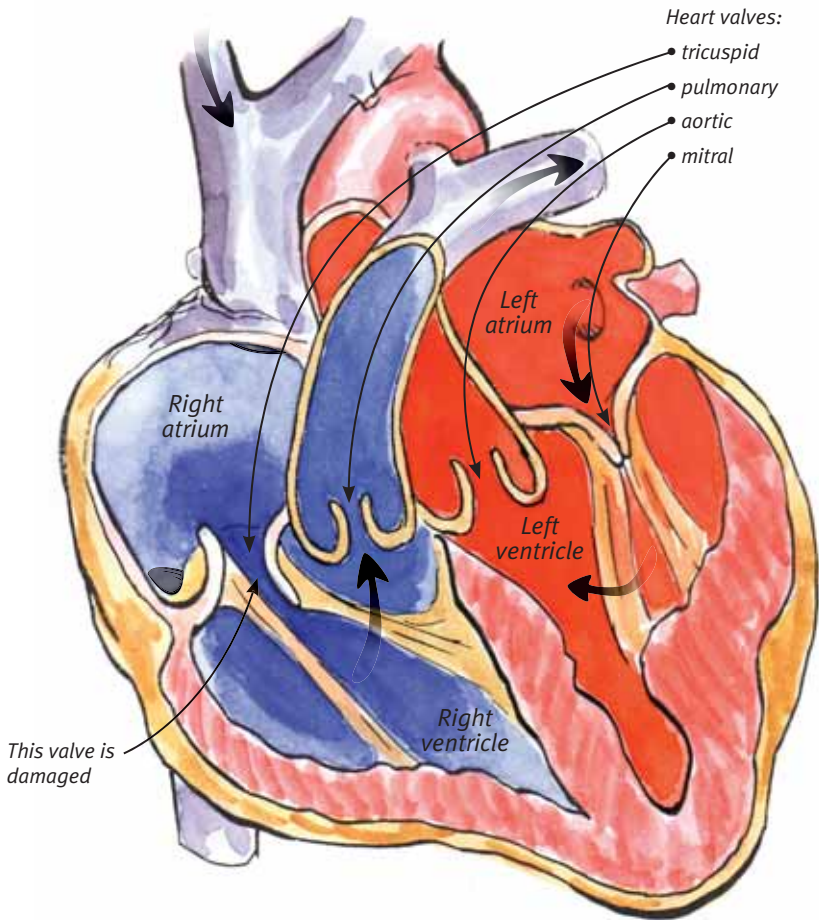


People who get rheumatic heart disease can end up very sick because the blood stops going the right way, making them tired and short of breath. They may not be able to do the things they used to - like hunting, sports, fishing, walking or housework.



Damage to your heart from rheumatic fever is called rheumatic heart disease.

The heart has 4 sections, they are like ‘rooms’, also called chambers. The heart valves are the ‘doors’ that stop the blood from flowing the wrong way.



HOW IS RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE TREATED?

The best way to avoid or treat rheumatic heart disease is with a penicillin needle every four weeks. The needles can be painful at first but most people quickly get used to them.

HOW LONG DO I NEED TO HAVE PENICILLIN INJECTIONS?

Most people need to have the injections for 10 years after the last Acute Rheumatic Fever episode, or until they are 21 years old (whichever is the longer period). This may seem like a long time but if you do not have these injections you could have another Rheumatic Fever attack. Your health worker, nurse or doctor can tell you more about the treatment. Your doctor will tell you when it is safe to stop having the injections.

DO THE NEEDLES PROTECT MY HEART FROM RHEUMATIC FEVER?

YES, having a penicillin needle every four weeks (28 days) for rheumatic fever is the only way to make sure the strep germs are being knocked out. This means your heart will stay healthy and will keep pumping the blood in the proper way. You will stay strong!



HOW CAN I REMEMBER TO GET MY NEEDLE ON TIME?

It's really important to remember your needle every 4 weeks (28 days). If you miss just one needle it could be enough to get rheumatic fever again. Ask the health worker, nurse or doctor for your own chart or injection card that tells you when you are due for your needle.

It's up to you to get it. Here are a few ways to remember when you are due for your needle:



- Keep your injection card in your wallet

- Tell your family and friends when you are due for your needle and ask them to remind you



- If any of your family or friends have rheumatic fever ask them to come and get you when they are going to the clinic for their needle



- Keep a chart of when you are due for your needle somewhere handy, like the fridge, toilet door or cupboard
- Go for your needle every second pension day
- Use your mobile phone to set a message or turn on the alarm



WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Because rheumatic fever can affect the heart, it is important NOT to add further stress on the heart from smoking or from being overweight.

- Look after yourself:
 - eat good foods,
 - be active and do regular exercise,





- don't drink a lot of alcohol,
- quit smoking



- Have regular check-ups with the health worker, nurse, doctor, paediatrician (kids specialist doctor), cardiologist (heart specialist doctor) and dentist.
- If you have a sore throat get it checked



- Have your flu and other vaccinations when they are due. The clinic staff or doctor can tell you which vaccinations, tests and check-ups you are due for.
- If you have skin sores get them checked
- Have a bath or shower every day



- Wash your hands properly, after the toilet, after changing nappies, after playing with animals and before eating food



- Look after your mouth and gums. This is important because germs can get in through unhealthy mouths and enter the blood which can cause (further) damage to your heart, called endocarditis. Please brush a couple of times a day and visit the dentist regularly (at least once a year).



WHAT DO I DO IF I'M PREGNANT, IF I NEED DENTAL TREATMENT OR AN OPERATION?

It's really important you tell the doctor, nurse or dentist that you have rheumatic fever or rheumatic heart disease. You will probably be given antibiotic medicine to take to stop any infections causing problems to your heart.





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For more information visit your doctor or clinic
and the website: www.RHDaustralia.org.au

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