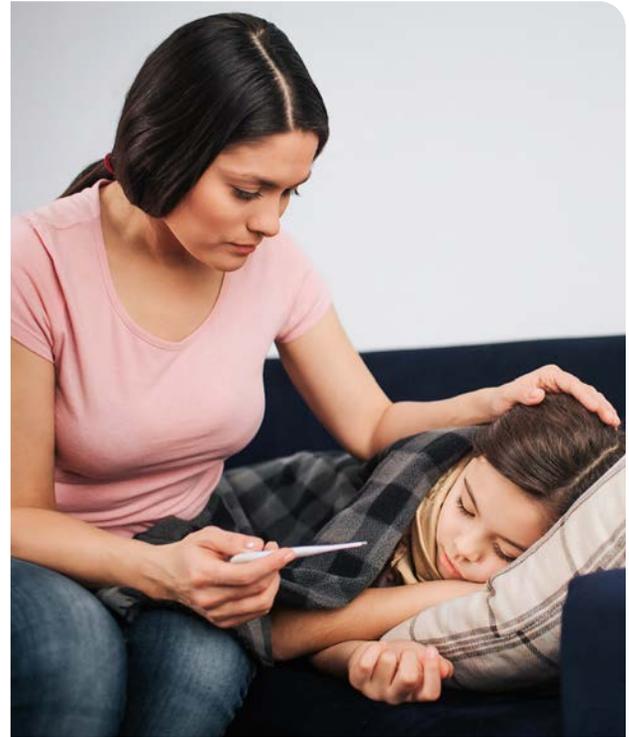


What About My Child and Rheumatic Fever?

Rheumatic fever is an inflammatory reaction that can occur after a streptococcal infection of the throat (“strep throat”) or scarlet fever if they are not treated properly. 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 three 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 most often 5 to 15 years old.



What are the symptoms of strep throat?

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 them to a doctor and have them tested.

Some common symptoms of strep throat include:

- Sore throat that can come on quickly
- Pain when swallowing
- Fever
- Red and swollen tonsils, sometimes with white patches or streaks
- Small, red spots on the roof of the mouth
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck

Some less common symptoms, especially in children, may include:

- Headache
- Stomach pain, nausea or vomiting

How can rheumatic fever affect my child?

Rheumatic fever can affect the heart, joints, skin and nervous system. Symptoms can vary, but may include:

- High fever
- Painful, tender, red, swollen joints (arthritis)
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, especially with exertion
- Skin rash, especially on the chest or abdomen
- Bumps under the skin
- Rapid heartbeat
- Chest pain

How is it treated?

The symptoms of rheumatic fever are treated with medicines to reduce fever, pain and general inflammation. Antibiotics are also given to treat group A strep infections.



What About My Child and Rheumatic Fever?

How can rheumatic fever affect the heart?

Rheumatic fever does not always affect the heart. When it does, the damage can go away or become permanent. When rheumatic fever causes lasting heart damage, it's called rheumatic heart disease.

When rheumatic fever affects the heart, it usually affects the heart valves. This can cause new or worsened heart murmurs. The heart inflammation normally goes away within five months. However, it may permanently damage the heart valves.

Heart failure may also develop. This can cause your child to feel tired and short of breath, have nausea or vomit, and develop a cough.

Do I need to restrict my child's activities?

If your child does not have heart inflammation, you do not need to limit their activity. However, if your child has joint pain or heart failure, you should limit their activities until the illness subsides.

Talk to your child's doctor because the answer can vary from child to child.

Can you get rheumatic fever more than once?

Your child is more likely than others to have another "attack." Your child's doctor will prescribe an antibiotic (usually penicillin) for them to take for an extended period, usually at least five years. The antibiotic prevents strep throat and protects your child from getting rheumatic fever again.

How can I protect my child from more problems?

People with rheumatic heart disease are at risk of developing an infection on their damaged heart valves. This infection is called "infective endocarditis." You can help reduce the risk your child's risk for this by having them maintain good oral hygiene.

Your child also may need to take antibiotics before certain dental or surgical procedures if they have:

- A history of infective endocarditis.
- An artificial heart valve or heart valve repair with artificial material.
- Some types of congenital heart defects.
- Had a heart transplant and developed heart valve problems.

Discuss your child's medical history with their doctor to determine if they are in this category.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

What medications will my child need to take?

MY QUESTIONS:

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