Heart Murmur

A heart murmur is an extra sound heard by your caregiver when listening to your heart with a device called a *stethoscope*. The sound might be a “hum” or “whoosh” sound heard when the heart beats. The sound comes from turbulence when blood flows through the heart. There are two types of heart murmurs:

- **Innocent (Harmless) murmurs**: Most people with this type of heart murmur do not have signs or symptoms of heart problems. Many children have innocent heart murmurs. When an innocent heart murmur is found, there is no need to get tests or do treatment. Also, there is no need to restrict activities or stop playing sports. Innocent heart murmurs may be caused by many things. For example, it might be caused by a tiny hole or defect in the wall of the heart. These defects often close as a child grows. An innocent heart murmur may be heard by an examining clinician throughout your life. If you see a new caregiver, please let him or her know this was found during past exams.

- **Abnormal murmurs**: May have signs and symptoms of heart problems. These types of murmurs can occur in children and adults. In children, abnormal heart murmurs are typically caused from heart defects that are present at birth. In adults, abnormal murmurs are usually from heart valve problems caused by disease, infection, or aging.

SYMPTOMS

- Innocent (Harmless) murmurs do not cause symptoms or require you to limit physical activity.
- Many people with abnormal murmurs may or may not have symptoms. If symptoms do develop, they might include:
  - Shortness of breath.
  - Blue coloring of the skin, especially on the fingertips.
  - Chest pain.
  - Palpitations or feeling a “fluttering” or a “skipped" heart beat.
  - Fainting.
  - Persistent cough.
  - Getting tired much faster than expected.

DIAGNOSIS

A heart murmur might be heard during a pre-sports physical or during any type of examination. When a murmur is heard, it may suggest a possible problem. When this happens, your caregiver may ask you to see a heart specialist (*cardiologist*). You may also be asked to undergo one or more heart tests. In these cases, testing may vary depending upon what your caregiver heard. Tests for a heart murmur might include one or more of the following:

- EKG (electrocardiogram).
- Echocardiogram.
- Cardiac MRI.

For children and adults who have an abnormal heart murmur and want to play sports, it is important to complete testing, review test results, and receive recommendations from your caregiver. If heart disease is present, it may be risky to play.

FINDING OUT THE RESULTS OF YOUR TEST

Not all test results are available during your visit. If your test results are not back during the visit, make an appointment with your caregiver to find out the results. Do not assume everything is normal if you have not heard from your caregiver or the medical facility. It is important for you to follow up on all of your test results.

TREATMENT

As noted above, innocent (harmless) murmurs require no treatment or activity restriction. If the murmur represents a problem with the heart, treatment will depend upon the exact nature of the problem. In these cases, medicine or surgery may be needed to treat the problem.

HOME CARE

If you want to participate in sports or other types of strenuous physical activity, it is important to discuss this first with your caregiver. If the murmur represents a problem with the heart and you choose to participate in sports, there is a small chance that a serious problem (including sudden death) could result.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You feel that your symptoms are slowly worsening.
- You develop any new symptoms that cause concern.
- You feel that you are having side effects from any medicines prescribed.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Chest pain develops.
- You are short of breath.
- You notice that your heart beats irregularly often enough to cause you to worry.
- You have fainting spells.
- There is a worsening of any problems that brought you or your child in for medical care.

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