



Talking to doctors

The aim of this fact sheet is to help you get the most out of an appointment with your child's cardiologist. It is important that you understand what the doctor is telling you and that you can ask any questions you have.

Preparing for your appointment

You may find it helpful to make a list of questions you want to ask the cardiologist. Prepare the list beforehand and take it with you to the appointment.

Depending on how old your child is, you may want to prepare them for the appointment as well. If your child is a bit older, ask them to think about any questions they want to ask the cardiologist. If your child is still quite young, you may want to check they understand what words and phrases like 'breathless' or 'keeping up with your friends' mean. This will help them to reply to the cardiologist's questions.

Older children, especially teenagers, may have questions that they are embarrassed to ask the doctor in front of you. Ask your child if they would like to talk to the cardiologist alone.

Taking someone else with you

Often both parents like to go to appointments. If this is not possible, you may want to ask a grandparent, another relative or a good friend to come with you. This person can support you and you can discuss the appointment with them afterwards.

General tips for appointments

- Repeating what you think the cardiologist has said will help to make sure that you have fully understood them. For example, "So you are saying that if my child has drug X, then Y will happen?"
- If you do not understand what the cardiologist is saying, ask them to explain again.

- When talking about the heart, it is often helpful if the cardiologist draws you a diagram.
- Take some paper and a pen so that you can write down important information.
- If there is too much information to write down or remember, ask for it to be sent to you in written form.

Remember:

- no question is a stupid one;
- do not worry that you are taking up too much of the cardiologist's time as it is important that you get all the information you need; and
- be assertive if necessary, but not aggressive.

Finding out that your child has a heart condition

Finding out your child has a heart condition can be very upsetting. It can be hard to take in everything you are being told. If you think of more questions after your appointment, book another appointment with the cardiologist or ask to speak to them on the phone.

Some of the questions you may want to ask in this situation are shown below.

- What is the name of my child's heart condition?
- Where is the best place to treat this condition? (Find out if there is a specialist paediatric cardiac unit that deals with this condition.)
- What treatment does the cardiologist recommend?
- Will your child need an operation?

Discussing further tests

If the cardiologist wants to do further tests on your child, you may want to ask the following questions.

- What are the tests for?
- What will happen during the tests?
- When and where will the tests be carried out?
- How accurate are the tests?
- When will the results be available?

Discussing new medication

If the cardiologist is suggesting putting your child on medication, you may want to ask the following.

- How long will your child have to take this medication?
- What are the possible side effects of this medication and how common are they?
- Are there any foods, other medicines or activities your child should avoid while taking this medication?
- What happens if the medication does not work?

Discussing an operation

All operations carry some risk. If the doctor is suggesting your child needs an operation, it is important that you understand what these risks are before you decide whether or not to give your permission. Some of the questions you may want to ask in this situation are shown below.

- How will the operation benefit my child?
- What are the risks involved in this operation?
- What is likely to happen if the operation is not done?
- Are there any alternatives to performing this operation?
- Who will be doing the operation?
- What are the success rates for this surgeon and this operation?
- How long does this operation usually take?
- How long will it take for my child to get back to their normal routine after the operation?
- Will my child be left with a scar?
- Is my child likely to need further operations or treatment after this operation?

Before you leave an appointment

Before you leave an appointment with the cardiologist, check that you will be receiving a detailed letter about the appointment. Your GP should also get a copy of this letter.

You should also make sure that you know what is happening next and why. Find out who you should speak to if you have any more questions.

More Information

We can put you in touch with families whose children have the same heart condition as your child and with families whose child is being treated in the same unit.

You may also find it useful to read our 'Second opinions' fact sheet, which explains why you might want to get a second opinion from a different cardiologist and how best to do this.



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