



Innocent Heart Murmur

WHAT IS A HEART MURMUR?

A heart murmur is a sound heard by staff listening to the heart with a stethoscope. It is made by the blood “whooshing” through various tubes (the *blood vessels*), valves, chambers of the heart and tight bends when pumped to all parts of the body.

These *murmurs* can be very common in both babies and young children. In the majority of cases there is nothing to worry about as a “murmur” doesn’t always mean there is something wrong with the heart. In fact, the heart could be working perfectly despite a *murmur* being identified. They can be heard incidentally during a routine check-up and cause no symptoms.

Innocent heart murmurs can sometimes come and go. This can explain why sometimes some babies and young children have a murmur one day and not the other. The heart rate is fast in babies and young children, compared to that of teenagers or adults. Therefore after exercise or if a high temperature is measured on a thermometer, the murmur can be louder. If the baby or young child is sleeping, the murmur can be quieter. The murmur intensity varies with breathing, heart rate and with the position of the child.

As a child moves into their teenage and adult life, the heart rate slows down, the previous tight bends become less tight and the heart sits lower in the chest away from the stethoscope, meaning there is less “whooshing” resulting in the murmur disappearing overtime.

There are occasions when a murmur may be associated with a heart problem (such as structural problems). This is usually picked up via a stethoscope and listening carefully to the *character* of the murmur. In some cases an electrocardiogram (ECG) and/or an echocardiogram (“ECHO”: a heart scan) are needed to look at the electrical activity of the heart and to scan the structure and function of the heart to identify if there is an underlying problem with the heart needing treatment. Examples of this meaning the murmur isn’t innocent could be narrow blood vessels, leaking valves or holes in the heart that shouldn’t be there resulting in blood moving the wrong way.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A HEART MURMUR?

An innocent heart murmur is exactly that – innocent. There will be no signs or symptoms. It will be identified as part of routine examination by a healthcare professional or during a feverish illness for example.



HOW IS A HEART MURMUR TREATED?

Innocent murmurs do not require follow-up. In some cases, if this has been identified during a feverish illness, a follow-up appointment after the feverish illness to listen to the character of the murmur may be offered. Innocent heart murmurs do not require medication.

If the character of the murmur suggests that it is not innocent then the cause needs to be established and referral to a general paediatrician or paediatric cardiologist may be needed to investigate the murmur further. Most murmurs are not signs of serious heart problems in children with no symptoms.

An innocent heart murmur does not restrict your child participating in sporting activities.

I HAVE BEEN REFERRED TO HAVE MY CHILD'S HEART MURMUR INVESTIGATED. WHEN SHOULD I SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION?

If you are worried about your child at any time, you should seek medical attention. However, medical assessment should be encouraged if your child has a heart murmur and any of the following is noted:

BABY

- Reduced feeding
- Unusual sweating
- Breathing difficulty
- Unexplained weight loss ("faltering growth")
- Colour change – turning pale or blue

YOUNG CHILD

- Breathing difficulty (reduced exercise tolerance or difficulty at rest)
- Unusual sweating
- Unexplained collapse/loss of consciousness (with or without exercise)
- Turning blue with exercise

Call 999 immediately if your child is struggling to breath or lips start to turn blue

