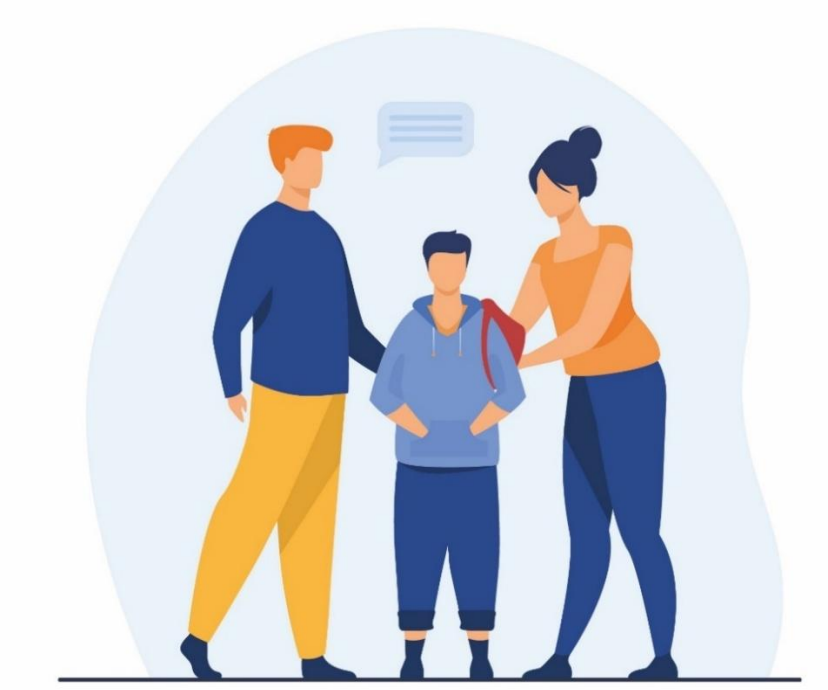
Contraception and pregnancy with a heart condition – What do parents need to know?

This leaflet contains information about the importance of getting specialist advice about contraception and pregnancy for teenagers who have a heart condition.



SOCN
SCOTTISH OBSTETRIC CARDIOLOGY NETWORK

Publication: 16 September 2026
Review: 31 March 2029
NSD610-025.22 V1

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Sex and relationships

While it may not be a comfortable subject for some parents, most teenagers will explore their sexuality. This includes developing relationships and thinking about sex. In Scotland, almost 30% of 15-year-olds have had sex, so it is important that these conversations begin early.

Having a heart condition does not stop your child from thinking about or having relationships and sex. However, it can affect the decisions they make about relationships, contraception and pregnancy.

This may be something that you have worried about – you may not have known what to say to your teenager or where to get advice. This leaflet provides a brief overview of some of the things people with heart conditions have to consider regarding contraception and pregnancy. This is important whether a person is planning a pregnancy or not.

Pregnancy and the heart

The heart needs to work harder throughout pregnancy, even from the early stages. The extra demands around the time of giving birth can place an even greater stress on the heart and circulation. Many women with a heart condition can cope with these changes well. For a small number of women, these changes are associated with an increased risk of complications. These complications vary depending on the heart condition, but can include arrhythmia (abnormal heart rhythms), heart failure or complications with main blood vessels. These complications can also affect the fetus and may result in babies being born smaller or delivered earlier.



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Talking about sex, contraception and pregnancy

Talking to your child about sex, contraception and pregnancy can be challenging. When your child has a heart condition it is even more important to have these conversations. Parents have an important role in helping their child find safe and accurate advice about contraception and sex and the effect of pregnancy on their heart. You may find it embarrassing or uncomfortable or not know how to even start this sort of conversation. Conversations about sex and contraception are part of preparing your child for being independent and an adult – a bit like how you teach them to cook, look after money and prepare to get a job. Your teenager's cardiology team can help you with the information you need to start these conversations.

Your teenager's heart condition can change during their life, even during their late teens and early adulthood. It is important that conversations about contraception and pregnancy become a routine part of their care in adulthood. How often these topics are discussed will depend on your teenager's plans for pregnancy and any changes in their heart condition.

Planning and pregnancy

Almost half of pregnancies are not planned. Women with a heart condition should avoid an unplanned pregnancy.

If a woman plans their pregnancy, this gives them time to discuss it with their healthcare team, along with any issues related to their heart condition, other medical conditions, mental health or social circumstances.

It is very important that your teenager has access to safe and reliable contraception before they start having sex, to avoid an unplanned pregnancy.



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When to get pregnant

There are many things that will influence the ideal time for a pregnancy. These include relationship status, finances, work plans and health. There may be times during a woman's life that a pregnancy may be lower or higher risk because of their heart or other health conditions. Ask a healthcare professional for advice about the timing of a pregnancy.

Contraceptive choice with a heart condition

Some forms of contraception may be unsuitable for use with certain heart conditions. In general, **long-acting reversible contraceptives** such as the progesterone injection or implant are **safe, reliable and well tolerated for most heart conditions**. If your teenager is someone who remembers to take tablets, the progesterone-only pill (mini-pill) can also be taken with most heart conditions.

We strongly advise that your teenager speaks to a healthcare professional about the safety and effectiveness of contraception for them.

Your teenager can get contraception from a GP, practice nurse, sexual-health clinic, Young People's Clinic and most pharmacies.

Emergency contraception

Emergency contraception can prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex or if regular contraception has failed. This might happen if your teenager forgets to take the contraceptive pill or if the condom splits.
There are two types of emergency contraception.

- Emergency contraceptive pill (sometimes called the morning-after pill)
- Intrauterine device (a coil)

While these are generally safe for people with a heart condition, it is important that your teenager tells the healthcare professional about their heart and any medications they may be taking.

The emergency contraceptive pill and the intrauterine device are available free from:

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- a GP practice that provides contraception;
- a sexual-health clinic; and
- some Young People's Clinics.

The emergency contraceptive pill is available free from:

- pharmacies; and
- some minor injuries units and accident and emergency departments.

More information is available at
www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/contraception/emergency-contraception/

Importance of a healthy lifestyle

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle will help reduce other risks in pregnancy for your teenager and their baby. Avoiding smoking and keeping a healthy weight are two very important ways to reduce these risks. Keeping other health conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy and mental health conditions stable is also very important. More information about health before pregnancy can be found at NHS Inform.

What if my teenager tells me they are pregnant?

If your teenager discovers that they are pregnant they should arrange to see a GP or midwife as early as possible.

They must tell the GP or midwife about their heart condition.



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Will the baby have the same heart condition as my teenager?

If your child has congenital heart disease, there is an increased risk that the baby could have a congenital heart defect. In general, this risk is around 8 to 12%. This won't necessarily be the same heart condition as your child.

For some people with inherited heart conditions, there is up to a 50% chance of the baby inheriting the condition. For these reasons it is important to find out from your teenager's healthcare team how it may be possible to reduce the risk of these conditions being passed on to the baby.

What about the boys?

Contraception and pregnancy health is important for boys too. The health of the partner has an effect on the health of mum and baby. Smoking and being overweight can increase the chance of a baby being born small or having other health problems.



Contraception is the responsibility of both people involved in a sexual relationship. For males, their heart condition does not affect the type of contraception they can use but may influence the decisions they make about having children. They can speak to their congenital heart disease team if they want to know more.

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Questions to ask your healthcare professional:

Questions to ask your teenager's healthcare professional

It's okay to ask for your child's healthcare professional to explain your heart condition to you and what it means for your child's future. You could ask the following.

- ☑ What is their risk in pregnancy?
- ☑ Can this risk change in the future?
- ☑ Can a pregnancy affect their current heart condition?
- ☑ Will the baby have the same heart condition?
- ☑ What methods of contraception are safe for my teenager and how can they access them?
- ☑ If they become pregnant, who should they tell?
- ☑ Who can I speak to if I want more advice?
- ☑ What can I do to help keep my teenager healthy?

More information about contraception and pregnancy for those with a heart condition is available at: **www.socn.scot.nhs.uk**

Contact us: nss.socn@nhs.scot

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Write below any other questions you may have:

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If you need this leaflet in an alternative format (such as large print), please:

- **email psd.contact-us@nhs.scot;**
- **phone 0131 275 6000; or**
- **contact Scotland BSL at www.contactscotland-bsl.org**

Crystal Mark 24082
Clarity approved by Plain English Campaign

This document has been prepared by Public Services Delivery Scotland (PSD Scotland) on behalf of the Scottish Obstetric Cardiology Network (SOCN). Accountable to Scottish Government, PSD Scotland works at the heart of the health service providing national strategic services to the rest of NHS Scotland and other public sector organisations to help them deliver their services more efficiently and effectively. SOCN is a collaboration of stakeholders involved in obstetric cardiology care, who are supported by a PSD Scotland Programme Team to drive improvement across the care pathway.

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