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

This leaflet contains information about the importance of getting specialist advice about contraception and planning a pregnancy if you have a heart condition.



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SCOTTISH OBSTETRIC CARDIOLOGY NETWORK

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Sex and relationships

Like any other teenager, you may want to explore your sexuality. This will include developing relationships and thinking about sex. Having a heart condition does not stop you from thinking about or having relationships and sex. However, having a heart condition can affect the decisions you make about relationships, contraception and pregnancy. This is relevant for all genders.

You might think that you do not want to have a baby until you are older, so you don't need to think about it now. While that might be the case, it is important you talk about this while you are a teenager to help you make decisions now and in the future.



What do I need to know?

Most women with a heart condition cope with pregnancy well, but any pregnancy carries a small risk of problems or complications for the mother or baby.

In most cases this risk is very low, but having a heart condition can increase the chance of problems during pregnancy, when you deliver your baby, or after you've had the baby. These risks will vary depending on the nature of your heart condition and how severe it is.

Pregnancy is considered very high risk in only a very small number of cases, and these women may be advised to avoid becoming pregnant.

Your heart condition can change during your life, even during your late teens and early adulthood. It is important that conversations about contraception and pregnancy become a routine part of your care in adulthood. How often these topics are discussed will depend on your plans for pregnancy, your heart condition, and if your heart is improving or changing. This will let your healthcare team assess your heart and how you are doing, and keep you informed about how your heart would cope with pregnancy.

Planning a pregnancy

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

If you plan your pregnancy, this gives you time to discuss it with your healthcare team, along with any issues related to your heart condition, other medical conditions, mental health or social circumstances.

It is very important that you have access to safe and reliable contraception before you start having sex, to avoid an unplanned pregnancy.

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 your life that a pregnancy may be lower or higher risk because of your heart or other health conditions. Ask a healthcare professional for advice about the timing of your pregnancy.



Who can I ask about contraception?

It can be difficult to talk about sex and contraception with parents. You might feel embarrassed or worry that you might get in trouble. These worries are normal. Talking about sex and relationships is an important part of you becoming an adult and being able to look after yourself. However, your parents may be able to help you find the best healthcare professional to ask for advice.

You can ask your GP, practice nurse, specialist cardiac nurse, cardiologist, pharmacist or a healthcare professional at a sexual-health clinic for advice. It is possible to have these conversations in private. In Scotland, contraception is free.

Can I use any type of contraception?

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** if you have a heart condition. If you are someone who remembers to take tablets, you can take the progesterone-only pill (mini-pill).

We strongly advise you to speak to your healthcare professional about the safety of certain types of contraception for you, especially if you have other health conditions. You can get contraception from your 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 your regular contraception has failed. This might happen if you forget 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 you tell the healthcare professional about your heart and about any medications you may be taking.

You can get the emergency contraceptive pill and the intrauterine device free from:

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

The emergency contraceptive pill is available for free from:

- pharmacies; and
- some minor injuries units and A & E departments.

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

Healthy lifestyle

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle as a teenager will help reduce the risks to you and your baby when you plan to start a family. 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 your mental health stable is also very important. It is important to look after your mental health and well-being, especially as a teenager when there can be a lot of pressure on you. It's important to think of who you can

speak to if you're struggling – this can be your parents, friends or a trusted adult. More information about health before pregnancy can be found at NHS Inform.

What if I am pregnant?

If you discover you are pregnant you should arrange to see your GP or midwife as early as possible by calling your GP surgery.

Tell them you have a heart condition.

Will the baby have the same heart condition as me?

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

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 talk to your healthcare team to find out how it may be possible to reduce the risk of these conditions being passed on to your baby.

What about the boys?

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

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



Questions to ask your healthcare professional:

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

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

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 24081
Clarity approved by Plain English Campaign

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