

Heart murmurs in a newborn infant

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What is a heart murmur?

A doctor can hear normal, regular heart sounds, such as normal heart valves closing, by listening to your baby's heart with a stethoscope.

A **heart murmur** is an extra or unusual sound made by the heart. Usually, a heart murmur is the sound of blood flowing around tight bends in your baby's heart and resembles a "whooshing" or "swishing" noise.

Does a heart murmur mean my baby has a heart problem?

Heart murmurs are very common in babies. In many cases the heart is working properly and the murmur should not cause any further problems.

However, a heart murmur can occasionally be associated with problems with the heart, such as a small hole, abnormal blood flow or narrowing.

What causes a heart murmur?

Babies have much higher heart rates than adults, and blood has to flow through two tight bends which can cause the sound of a heart murmur. This is known as an 'innocent' murmur and will disappear as your baby gets older.

In rarer cases, a heart murmur may be the sign of structural problems in the heart such as a narrowing, a leaking valve, or a hole between chambers in the heart or between the arteries. If there is a problem causing a heart murmur, there is treatment available if needed.

Will my baby have any investigations for this?

The doctor will examine your baby with a stethoscope and may request extra tests to confirm if the unusual or extra sound appears to be an 'innocent' murmur.

These tests may include: feeling your baby's pulse, checking your baby's oxygen level (called saturation), doing a chest x-ray, doing an electro-cardiogram (ECG), taking a blood pressure and/or an echocardiogram (an ultrasound of your baby's heart).

Can I take my baby home?

As long as the doctors feel your baby has an 'innocent' heart murmur and there are no other problems, you may be able to take your baby home after 24 hours.

How will I know if my baby has a heart problem?

You will be asked to bring your baby back to North Devon District Hospital for a clinic appointment within 2-6 weeks. If the murmur can still be heard, then your baby may be referred to a specialist heart doctor for further examination and investigation.

What should I look out for?

Most 'innocent' heart murmurs will have no obvious signs or symptoms and will only be recognised by a doctor during a routine examination.

If your baby does become unwell, they should be seen urgently by a doctor. Things to look out for include:

- Breathing difficulties; breathless or sweaty when feeding
- Poor or reduced feeding
- Blue colour of the skin and lips
- Mottled skin

Please phone your GP or the out-of-hours GP service (NHS 111). If your baby becomes really unwell, please call 999/112 and explain that your baby has a heart murmur and they have become unwell.

Further information

The British Heart Foundation

www.bhf.org.uk

References

Great Ormond Street Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. (2012). Innocent Heart Murmur. [Online] Available at: <http://www.gosh.nhs.uk/medical-information/heart-murmurs-innocent> [Accessed 27/07/2017].

PALS

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