



## What About My Child and Rheumatic Fever?

Rheumatic fever is an inflammatory reaction that can occur after a streptococcal infection of the throat (“strep throat”). Most strep throat infections don’t lead to rheumatic fever. When they do, the time between the strep throat and rheumatic fever is about two to four weeks. Rheumatic fever is not contagious; however, the strep infection that comes before it is. If a strep throat infection is treated, rheumatic fever can almost always be prevented. Anyone can get rheumatic fever, but those who do are often 5 to 15 years old.



### What are the common symptoms of strep throat?

Symptoms of strep throat include (but are not limited to):

- Sudden onset of a sore throat
- Pain on swallowing
- Fever (usually 101-104°F)
- Headache
- Abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting, especially in children

The symptoms may be mild in some children. If your child has a sore throat, you can’t know for sure if it’s strep throat unless you take him or her to a doctor.

### How does rheumatic fever affect the body?

It may affect many parts of the body. It can affect the heart and produce inflamed or scarred heart valves.

Symptoms can vary widely, but may include:

- Fever
- Painful, tender, red, swollen joints
- Shortness of breath
- Skin rashes, especially on the chest or abdomen
- Bumps under the skin

### Does it always affect the heart?

No. When it does, the damage may either disappear or remain. When rheumatic fever causes permanent heart damage, it’s called rheumatic heart disease.

### Is there a cure for it?

There’s no “miracle drug” to cure it. An attack of rheumatic fever usually subsides within a few weeks to a few months, but heart damage may last for life. That’s why prevention is so important.

*(continued)*



**If my child has had rheumatic fever, must I restrict his or her activities?**

Most children don't need to have their activities restricted after the acute stage of this illness. But talk to your doctor because the answer varies from child to child.

**Can you get it more than once?**

Yes. Your child is much more likely than others to have another "attack." Taking an antibiotic (usually penicillin) regularly for many years can prevent most recurrences. The antibiotic prevents strep throat and protects the patient from getting rheumatic fever again.

**If my child has rheumatic heart disease, how can I protect him or her from more problems?**

People with rheumatic heart disease are at risk of developing an infection on their damaged heart valves. This infection is called "infective endocarditis." You can help reduce the risk for this problem by keeping teeth clean and cavities filled.

Your child may need to take a dose of antibiotics before certain dental or surgical procedures if they have:



Keeping your child's teeth clean and cavities filled can help prevent infective endocarditis.

- a history of endocarditis.
- an artificial heart valve.
- certain congenital heart defects.
- had a heart transplant and have heart valve problems.

Discuss your child's medical history with your doctor to determine if they are in this category.

**HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?**

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

**Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?**

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**What can I do to protect my child from rheumatic fever?**

**My Questions:**

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.

