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Commentary

Effects of Congenital Heart Disease and its Symptoms

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DESCRIPTION

Congenital heart disease is a general term for many birth defects that affect the normal functioning of the heart. Congenital heart disease is one or more problems that occur with the structure of the heart which are present from the birth. Congenital means the person was born with the condition. In most cases, no obvious cause of congenital heart disease is identified. Congenital heart defects in adults and children can alter blood flow through the heart. There are many types of congenital heart disease, they may occur in one or more sites of the heart. The most common types of CHD are septal defects ("hole in the heart"), openings in the wall between the left and right sides of the heart, and valvular heart disease where there is a problem with the valves that control blood flow through the heart, defects in the large blood vessels that carry blood to and from the heart. CHD are present at birth and can affect the baby's heart structure and its function. They can affect the way blood flows through the heart and to other parts of the body. CHD can range from mild (such as a small hole in the heart) to severe (such as a missing or malformed heart). However, advances in diagnosis and treatment continue to improve survival for people with congenital heart disease. People with congenital heart disease require lifelong medical care. Treatment may include regular checks (monitoring), medication, or surgery.

Many cases of congenital heart disease are diagnosed before the birth of a baby during a pregnancy ultrasound scan. Some factors known to increase the risk of this condition include: Down syndrome, a genetic disorder that affects the normal physical development of the baby and causes learning disabilities, the mother having certain diseases such as rubella during pregnancy, mother taking certain types of drugs during pregnancy, like statins and acne medications, the mother smoking or taking alcohol during pregnancy, the mother having poorly controlled type 1 or type 2 diabetes, and other chromosomal abnormalities where genes can be change from its normal form and can be inherited (run in families). In most cases, congenital heart disease does not occur in families, however, if the mother or other parent has a congenital heart defect, or if the mother previously has a child with a congenital heart defect, the child is more likely to be born with a congenital heart defect. Many physicians classify congenital heart disease as either cyanotic or acyanotic congenital heart disease. In either type, the heart cannot pump blood as efficiently as it should. The main difference is that the cyanotic congenital heart disease reduces the level of oxygen in the blood and acyanotic congenital heart disease does not. Babies with low oxygen levels may experience shortness of breath and a bluish discoloration of their skin. Babies with plenty of oxygen in their blood do not show these symptoms, but can develop complications such as high blood pressure. Congenital heart defects do not cause pain. Children with congenital heart disease are likely to be smaller than the other children, have problems or delays in mental and emotional development, have speech and language problems and also have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), etc. There are different signs and symptoms depending on the type and number of defects and their severity. Common signs and symptoms of congenital heart disease are:

- Cyanosis: A bluish discoloration of the skin, lips, fingers, toes and nails. Occurs when there isn't enough oxygen in the blood
- Fatigue: Babies may be unusually sleepy or very tired while breastfeeding.
- Poor blood flow
- Breathing rapidly or with difficulty
- Heart murmur: An abnormal sound between heartbeats
- Delayed growth
- hard to feed
- low birth weight

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