



How to Talk to People with Congenital Heart Defects About Lifelong Cardiac Care

People with heart defects need lifelong congenital cardiac care. You can help make sure they get it!

As an obstetrician-gynecologist, you see patients at many life stages — and you may be the only physician some of your patients see. That's why it's important to emphasize why people with heart defects need to see a congenital cardiologist — and to refer patients who aren't seeing one. When you do, you'll help patients with heart defects stay healthy and safe.

Use these talking points to help start the conversation.

1 Find out if patients have heart defects



“Have you ever had any heart problems — even as a child? For example, did you ever have heart surgery or take medicine for your heart? If you did, I want to make sure you get the care you need to stay healthy.”

Some patients with a heart defect may not mention it — so it's up to you to find out. When you learn that a patient has a heart defect, ask if they're seeing a congenital cardiologist.

2 Explain why patients need congenital cardiac care



“Heart defects last for a lifetime. They can also get worse over time — but they may not cause symptoms right away. That's why you need to see a congenital cardiologist regularly.”

When people with heart defects are feeling healthy, they may not realize they need to see a congenital cardiologist. Explain that congenital cardiologists can catch problems early to help make sure patients *stay* healthy.

3 Describe what a congenital cardiologist does



“A congenital cardiologist is a doctor who's trained to treat heart problems like yours. They know how to tell if a heart problem is getting worse and how to help you stay healthy.”

Some patients with heart defects may not understand why they need to see another physician, so it's important to explain what a congenital cardiologist does. Emphasize that congenital cardiologists know more about heart defects than anyone else — including which medicines or procedures patients may need.

4 Tell patients you can make a referral



“I can refer you to a congenital cardiologist to make sure you're getting the care you need.”

Work with patients to help them find a congenital cardiologist. Make sure you know how to find congenital cardiologists in your area so you can refer patients who aren't getting the care they need. If you need help, check out the Adult Congenital Heart Association Clinical Directory at: bit.ly/ACHDdirectory

Help patients with heart defects have a healthy pregnancy

Many people with heart defects have healthy pregnancies, but heart defects can increase the risk for pregnancy complications. When you see patients who are pregnant or plan to get pregnant, stress the importance of regular congenital cardiac care. You could say:

“Even if you're feeling healthy now, your heart defect could affect your pregnancy. That's why you need to see a congenital cardiologist regularly. They can help protect your health — and your baby's.”



To learn more, check out:

- aap.org/CHDcare
- cdc.gov/heartdefects
- chphc.org



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