

Impact of congenital heart defect

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Introduction

A Congenital Heart Defect (CHD), also known as a congenital heart anomaly and congenital heart disease, is a defect in the structure of the heart or great vessels that is present at birth. Signs and symptoms depend on the specific type of defect. Symptoms can vary from none to life-threatening. When present, symptoms may include rapid breathing, bluish skin (cyanosis), poor weight gain, and feeling tired. CHD does not cause chest pain. Most congenital heart defects are not associated with other diseases. A complication of CHD is heart failure.

The cause of a congenital heart defect is often unknown. Risk factors include certain infections during pregnancy such as rubella, use of certain medications or drugs such as alcohol or tobacco, parents being closely related, or poor nutritional status or obesity in the mother. Having a parent with a congenital heart defect is also a risk factor. A number of genetic conditions are associated with heart defects, including Down syndrome, Turner syndrome, and Marfan syndrome. Congenital heart defects are divided into two main groups: cyanotic heart defects and non-cyanotic heart defects, depending on whether the child has the potential to turn bluish in color. The defects may involve the interior walls of the heart, the heart valves, or the large blood vessels that lead to and from the heart.

Congenital heart defects are partly preventable through rubella vaccination, the adding of iodine to salt, and the adding of folic acid to certain food products. Some defects do not need treatment. Others may be effectively treated with catheter based procedures or heart surgery. Occasionally a number of operations may be needed, or a heart transplant may be required. With appropriate treatment, outcomes are generally good, even with complex problems.

Congenital heart defects are the most common birth defect. In 2015, they were present in 48.9 million people globally. They affect between 4 and 75 per 1,000 live births, depending upon how they are diagnosed. In about 6 to 19 per 1,000 they cause a moderate to severe degree of problems. Congenital heart defects are the leading cause of birth defect-related deaths: in 2015, they resulted in 303,300 deaths, down from 366,000 deaths in 1990.

Signs and symptoms are related to type and severity of the heart defect. Symptoms frequently present early in life, but it is possible for some CHDs to go undetected throughout life. Some children have no signs while others may exhibit shortness of breath, cyanosis, fainting, heart murmur, under-development of limbs and muscles, poor feeding or growth, or respiratory infections. Congenital heart defects cause abnormal heart structure resulting in production of certain sounds called heart murmur. These can sometimes be detected by auscultation; however, not all heart murmurs are caused by congenital heart defects.

Conclusion

The cause of congenital heart disease may be genetic, environmental, or a combination of both.

Many congenital heart defects can be diagnosed prenatally by fetal echocardiography. This is a test which can be done during the second trimester of pregnancy, when the woman is about 18-24 weeks pregnant. It can be an abdominal ultrasound or transvaginal ultrasound.

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