



Your Heart During Pregnancy



pregnancy, labor and delivery

Pregnancy causes both excitement and anxiety. You can have a healthy pregnancy by working closely with members of your ACHD team, your obstetrician and others.

How Your Body Changes During Pregnancy

Your body is growing a placenta, adding breast tissue, increasing blood volume, making amniotic fluid and creating a baby.

Your heart is beating faster and working harder. The weight of your baby and uterus on your major blood vessels can decrease the blood flow to your head and make you dizzy and lightheaded at times.

Hormone changes can lower your blood pressure. You may also have anemia (low red blood cell count), which can cause you to feel really tired (fatigued).

How Your Health Care Team Will Care for You

Your cardiologist and obstetrician will tell you how often they need to see you during your pregnancy. Your cardiologist will watch you for symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath (especially at night or with effort or exercise), palpitations, leg swelling and other changes. Your heart rate and blood pressure will be checked and you will have EKGs and echocardiograms at each visit.

You should see your adult congenital heart disease (ACHD) cardiologist and obstetrician as early as possible during pregnancy. It is important to be followed closely during your pregnancy to watch for any changes in your or your baby's health. Taking good care of yourself is the best way to make sure you and your baby are healthy.



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Your obstetrician will check your baby's growth. There is an increased risk of your baby having a congenital heart defect. An ultrasound of the baby's heart will be done around 20 weeks to screen for any heart defects.

Keep all appointments with your cardiologist and obstetrician. Tell them about any symptoms you have. Some pregnancy changes can be similar to symptoms of your heart condition.

Your Heart During Labor and Delivery

You should be able to have your baby by vaginal birth. Having a Cesarean birth (delivering a baby during surgery) has more risks. If your baby needs to be born by Cesarean, your obstetrician will talk with you about the risks and benefits.

During labor your heart works harder as more blood is pushed through your body as you have contractions. This can cause your heart rate and blood pressure to rise, possibly to a dangerous level.

You may have pain medicine and anesthesia to help reduce the workload of your heart. Your obstetrician may also want to use forceps or vacuum suction to help deliver your baby to reduce the strain on your heart.

Members of your health care team will watch you for symptoms until you are safe to go home. Symptoms of shortness of breath, abnormal heart rhythms and increased swelling can be signs of a new heart problem.

You may need to stay in the hospital longer than average to make sure your heart doesn't have any issues. It may take a few weeks for your body to recover to pre-pregnancy levels.

Follow your pediatrician's schedule for your baby's well checkups. Follow up with your ACHD cardiologist 3 months after delivery to check how your heart is recovering.



Talk with members of your care circle

Pregnancy hormones affect your emotions as well as your body. In addition, not getting enough sleep and dealing with physical discomforts can make you feel overwhelmed at times.

Share your emotions with members of your care circle (family members, friends and those close to you).

Talking about your excitement, hopes, fears, concerns and feelings can help limit stress. That's good for both you and your baby.

