



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

People with heart defects need lifelong congenital cardiac care. As a primary care physician, you can help make sure they get it.

Specifically, it's important that you emphasize why people with heart defects need to see a congenital cardiologist—and that you 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 lifelong care



“Heart defects are a lifelong condition. 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 continue 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.”

Reassure patients that you can 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 seeing one. If you need help finding congenital cardiologists, check out the Adult Congenital Heart Association Clinical Directory at: bit.ly/ACHDdirectory

Talk to young adults about transitioning to adult care

Many children and teens born with heart defects stop seeing their pediatric cardiologist and never transition to adult congenital cardiac care. That's why it's especially important to talk with young adults about seeing a congenital cardiologist in adulthood — and make referrals for patients who need them. You could say:

“As an adult, it's important that you see a congenital cardiologist regularly even when you're feeling healthy. They can help make sure you *stay* healthy”



To learn more, check out:

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



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