

Infective endocarditis *... what you can do to avoid it*

Information for parents of young
people with congenital heart disease



Leeds children's
hospital

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What is Endocarditis?

Endocarditis is a rare infection of the inner lining of the heart.

It most commonly affects one or more of the heart valves, but may also occur around holes between the heart chambers, at the site of abnormalities in the walls of arteries or at the site of previous heart or arterial surgery.

It is a serious condition and can cause major damage to the heart valves and may even cause stroke or death.

Most endocarditis occurs in patients already known to have heart abnormalities.

Most patients with congenital heart disease are at increased risk of getting endocarditis. The only exceptions being isolated atrial septal defects or patients who have had completely curative treatment.

How can I reduce the risk of getting endocarditis?

Endocarditis can only occur if bacteria get into the bloodstream (called bacteraemia). Although it is not possible to prevent all bacteria getting into the bloodstream, there are some things you can do to reduce the risk of getting endocarditis.

Everybody carries bacteria in the mouth. These bacteria are usually harmless, but if the teeth or gums become diseased it becomes much easier for large numbers of bacteria to get into the blood, with the risk they may settle in the heart and cause endocarditis. Good oral health is therefore particularly important to reduce the risk of endocarditis.

You can help reduce the risk of endocarditis by:

- Tooth brushing twice a day, using a fluoride toothpaste, with supervision from an adult until the age of at least 7-8 years old
- Having a healthy diet including plain water/milk to drink between meals
- Visiting your dentist for regular check-ups

The dental team at your dental surgery will give you more detailed advice on how to look after your child's teeth and gums. There is also information on our website at

www.leedscongenitalhearts.com

If your child has toothache/infection in their mouth, dental care should be sought as soon as possible.

What if I am having difficulties finding a dentist?

- Visit the NHS website which keeps a directory of local dental services www.nhs.uk
- Call NHS 111 who can provide advice and/or provide access to emergency dental services.

Are there other things that risk endocarditis?

Ear piercing, other body piercings or tattooing can lead to infections that may cause endocarditis.

How can I recognise endocarditis?

Patients with endocarditis develop a temperature and feel generally unwell, with symptoms very similar to having the flu.

Flu is very common and usually resolves after about a week.

Flu-like symptoms with a temperature which persist for longer than a week should be reported to your cardiologist, not just to your GP, so that specialist tests can be carried out to check for endocarditis.

Key points to remember

- Good oral health can reduce the risk of endocarditis
- Have a healthy diet avoiding sugary snacks and drinks (drink plain water)
- Tooth brushing should be twice a day, using a fluoride toothpaste, with supervision from an adult until the age of at least 7-8 years old
- Visit your dentist regularly
- Recognise symptoms of endocarditis: Flu like symptoms with a temperature that last longer than a week, with no obvious cause

If you have any questions or concerns please speak to the Children's Cardiac Nurse Specialists:

Email: ccns.lgi@nhs.net **Tel:** 0113 392 5467

www.leedscongenitalhearts.com

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