

Cardiovascular Disease Information Sheet

Narrow, blocked or stiffened blood vessels can prevent the heart, brain or other parts of the body from receiving sufficient amounts of blood. This is cardiovascular disease. Other heart conditions, such as infections and conditions that affect the heart's muscle, valves or beating rhythm, are forms of heart disease. There are two major types of heart problems in children: congenital and acquired.

Congenital heart disease is any structural or functional imperfection in the heart that develops before birth. The cause and prevention of most of these issues is unknown. On the average, for every 1000 births, six to eight babies have congenital heart defects. Many mild defects require no treatment. Others, described as moderate to severe, must be treated.

The second type of heart problem that occurs in children is acquired heart disease. This appears after birth. Usually it is the result of damage done to the heart by a disease, virus or bacteria. The most common acquired heart disease is caused by rheumatic fever, an uncommon inflammatory disease that can occur after streptococcal infections of the respiratory tract. Although extremely rare in this country, it is common in developing countries. In some children with acquired heart disease, a cause cannot be found.

Symptoms

- Unable to keep up physically with peers
- Out of breath with activity sooner than other children
- Sweaty with activity sooner than other children
- Blue around the gums/tongue
- Unconscious
- Chest pain with exercise
- Dizziness with exercise
- Palpitations, heart skipping a beat or beating abnormally

Treatment

Treatments include surgery, cardiac catheterization and heart transplant. The student's physician may make recommendations about physical activity and diet.

Educational Implications

Some children with altered cardiovascular functioning have few problems in returning to school, while others will need structured support to ensure that they participate to their maximum abilities. It is good for students to take responsibility for their medical management and recognize the limits on their activity levels. Some students may need to have classes on upper

floors relocated to the ground floor or use an elevator. Some students may require a shortened day, regularly scheduled rest breaks or homebound instruction.

Educational Options

Those students whose cardiovascular disease adversely affects their educational performance may benefit from special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify under IDEA, a student must meet eligibility criteria in one of thirteen specific disability categories. Under IDEA, a student with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and an individualized education program, including individual goals, objectives, related services, accommodations and modifications.

Students that do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example learning, breathing, thinking, concentrating, walking, bodily functions). Under Section 504, a student is entitled to equal opportunity, and may qualify for a Section 504 plan that provides regular or special education and related aids and services.

A student with a health condition who does not require special instruction and related services can receive, as appropriate, a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, individualized health plans (IHP), emergency care plans (ECP) and local education agency supports.