



British Heart  
Foundation

# Heart murmur

## What is a heart murmur?

When a doctor listens to your heart, he or she can hear the sounds made by the blood flowing through the heart, and by the valves in your heart opening and closing. These are normal sounds that the doctor expects to hear.

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A heart murmur is an extra or unusual sound which may be heard. It may be caused by an underlying heart problem, but often there is no cause at all.

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## What causes it?

Murmurs can be heard when the heart contracts (a systolic murmur) or when the heart relaxes (a diastolic murmur). People who have a healthy heart can sometimes have murmurs.

People with anaemia can have murmurs and they are often heard in pregnant women due to the unusually large flow of blood through the heart.

Sometimes heart murmurs are heard because of a defect in a heart valve, or because of a congenital abnormality in the heart, such as a hole in the heart. ('Congenital' means that you were born with the condition.) Some heart valve defects may be minor, but there can be more serious problems that may need treatment – for example if the heart valve is narrowed, prolapsed (weak or floppy) or leaking.

## Will I need treatment?

What treatment you may need, if any at all, will depend on the cause of your murmur and any symptoms you may have. Your doctor will usually arrange for you to have an echocardiogram (an ultrasound of your heart). This will show if there are any problems with the structure of your heart or valves.

If you do need treatment, this may be medicines to control your symptoms. Or, corrective surgery – for example if there is a problem with one of your valves and it is severe it may need repairing or replacing.

## Heart Helpline

**Our cardiac nurses and information support officers are here to answer your questions and give you all the heart health information and support you need.**

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**Call us on 0300 330 3311**

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**Similar cost to 01 or 02 numbers.  
Lines are open 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday.**

**This information does not replace the advice that your doctor or nurse may give you. If you are worried about your heart health in any way, contact your GP or local healthcare provider.**

## 'Innocent murmurs' in children

Heart murmurs are a common finding in children, and can be described as being 'innocent'. They are harmless and not caused by an abnormality of the heart, such as a hole in the heart or other congenital heart defect. Specialists can often tell the difference by the sound they make. Innocent murmurs may come and go, or they may vary depending on the child's position, breathing and heart rate. They usually disappear by the time the child reaches puberty.