

# STRONG BODY

# STRONG HEART



Information about **Acute Rheumatic Fever**  
and **Rheumatic Heart Disease**

# WHAT IS ACUTE RHEUMATIC FEVER?



It is a sickness caused by the streptococcal (Strep) germ. This is the same germ that causes sore throats and skin sores. Sometimes after causing a sore throat the strep germ can cause the body's germ defence system to start attacking your joints, heart, brain and skin – this is called acute rheumatic fever.

(STAFF IN HOSPITAL AND CLINICS WILL OFTEN SAY ARF, WHICH STANDS FOR ACUTE RHEUMATIC FEVER).



# WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ACUTE RHEUMATIC FEVER?

Acute rheumatic fever can happen 2 to 4 weeks after a sore throat or skin sores. Acute rheumatic fever can cause fevers and pains and swelling in the joints. Mainly in the big joints like knees, ankles, wrists and elbows.

Sometimes it can hurt so much that you cannot walk or move.

Sometimes acute rheumatic fever can also affect the brain which will cause twitching or jerking. This is called chorea.





## THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT ACUTE RHEUMATIC FEVER IS

that it can damage the valves inside your heart. A special heart scan called an echo-cardiogram will be done to see if your heart has been damaged. Your heart will need to be checked for damage every 1-2 years.



**ACUTE RHEUMATIC FEVER  
USUALLY AFFECTS  
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN  
BUT ADULTS CAN ALSO GET IT.**

Because the strep germ (streptococcus) can come back again, acute rheumatic fever can too, even when you're an adult.



# WHY IS AVOIDING ACUTE RHEUMATIC FEVER IMPORTANT?

Acute Rheumatic Fever can happen again and again.

Each time it comes back the heart can get damaged and no longer work properly. This is called Rheumatic Heart Disease.

# HOW DO I STOP ACUTE RHEUMATIC FEVER COMING BACK?

Having a penicillin needle, called Bicillin, every 21 to 28 days is the only way to stop the Strep germ getting into the body and stop acute rheumatic fever happening again.

The needle is given in the muscle of your bottom or thigh. Even though this may hurt a bit, it is important you get your needle every 21-28 days. If you are late for your needle you can get acute rheumatic fever again!



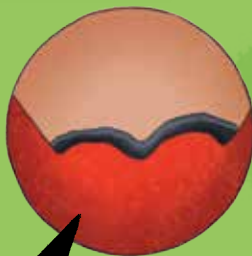
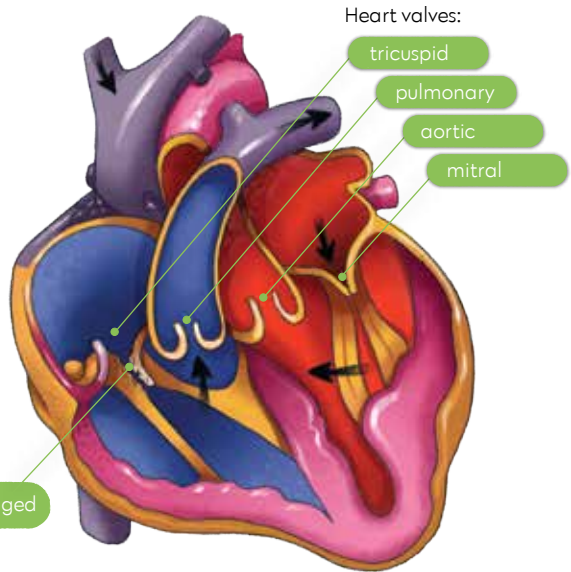


People who get rheumatic heart disease can end up very sick because their heart doesn't work properly that can make them tired and short of breath. They may not be able to do the things they used to - like hunting, sports, fishing, walking or housework.



# INSIDE THE HEART

The heart has 4 sections, they are like 'rooms', also called chambers. The heart valves are the 'doors' that stop the blood from flowing the wrong way. Rheumatic Heart Disease is the damage to the valves that makes the heart weak.



Healthy Closed Valve



Valve damaged from rheumatic heart disease

# HOW IS RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE TREATED?

The best way to avoid or treat rheumatic heart disease is with a penicillin needle, called Bicillin every 21 to 28 days. The needles can be painful at first but most people quickly get used to them. You can talk to your nurse or doctor about ways to reduce the pain you may feel.

# HOW LONG DO I NEED TO HAVE BICILLIN INJECTIONS?

Most people need to have the injections for 10 years after the last acute rheumatic fever episode, or until they are 21 years old (whichever is the longer period). This may seem like a long time but if you do not have these injections you could get acute rheumatic fever again.

Your health worker, nurse or doctor can tell you more about the treatment. Your doctor will tell you when it is safe to stop having the injections.





## DO THE NEEDLES PROTECT MY HEART FROM ACUTE RHEUMATIC FEVER?

YES, having a penicillin needle every 21 to 28 days for acute rheumatic fever is the only way to make sure the strep germs are killed.

This means your heart will **stay healthy** and you will **stay strong!**

## HOW CAN I REMEMBER TO GET MY NEEDLE ON TIME?

It's really important to remember your needle every 21 to 28 days. If you miss just one needle you could get acute rheumatic fever again.

Ask the health worker, nurse or doctor for a card to record the date of your next injection. It's up to you to get it. Here are a few ways to remember when you are due for your needle:

# TIPS TO REMEMBER WHEN YOUR BICILLIN NEEDLE IS DUE:

Use the calendar on your mobile phone to set a message or turn on the alarm.



Get the app at:  
[www.rhdaustralia.org.au/treatment-tracker-app](http://www.rhdaustralia.org.au/treatment-tracker-app)

Keep your injection card in your wallet  
and ask your health clinic to send you  
reminders.



Tell your family and friends when you are due for your needle and ask them to remind you.

If any of your family or friends have acute rheumatic fever ask them to come and get you when they are going for their injection.



Keep a chart of when you are due for your needle somewhere handy, like the fridge or back of the toilet door.

# WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

## EAT GOOD FOODS

Because acute rheumatic fever can affect the heart, it is **IMPORTANT** to protect your heart.



## LOOK AFTER YOURSELF TO STAY HEALTHY

Be active and do regular exercise.



**DON'T DRINK  
A LOT OF ALCOHOL  
AND QUIT SMOKING**



# HAVE REGULAR MEDICAL CHECK-UPS

Regular medical check-ups with your doctor are important.

Have your flu and pneumococcal vaccines when they are due.

- If you have a sore throat or skin sores get them checked and take your antibiotics until they are finished.
- See your specialist every 1-2 years.

Paediatrician (kids' doctor).

Cardiologist (heart doctor).

Physician (adult medical specialist).





# KEEPING YOUR SKIN CLEAN AND HEALTHY IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP THE STREP GERM AWAY



Have a bath or shower every day.

Always wash your hands with soap after using the toilet, changing nappies, touching and playing with animals and before drinking and eating.

## LOOK AFTER YOUR MOUTH AND GUMS

It's really important you tell any doctor, nurse or dentist that you have acute rheumatic fever or rheumatic heart disease. Before any operation or dental treatment, you will be given antibiotic medicine to stop any germs from your mouth causing problems to your heart.

## WHAT TO DO WHEN I AM PREGNANT

Being pregnant puts stress on the heart. If you have had acute rheumatic fever or rheumatic heart disease it is very important that you keep going to your doctor, nurse or midwife all through your pregnancy for regular check-ups.

It is also important to continue your Bicillin injections. They are safe to have during pregnancy.



# INJECTION REMINDER CARD

Month

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

♡ DENTIST

Month

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

♡ ECHO

Month

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Month

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

♡ Specialist appointments

Month

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Month

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

For more information contact  
**For more information ask your  
doctor, nurse, or health worker today**

