Top Ten Things To Know
Promotion of Physical Activity for Children and Adults with Congenital Heart Disease

1. Congenital heart disease (CHD; heart structural problems existing since birth) is estimated to affect more than 859,000 children and 850,000 adults in the United States.

2. Health care providers say they do not have the knowledge, skills, resources, or time needed to implement the extensive literature on physical activity promotion or to counsel patients about physical activity.

3. Most patients with CHD are relatively sedentary; therefore physical and psychosocial health benefits of physical activity are important for this population, which is at risk for exercise intolerance, obesity, and psychosocial morbidities.

4. Counseling to encourage daily participation in appropriate physical activity should be a core component of every patient encounter.

5. Health care providers should provide patients with referrals to specific physical activity counseling resources, in the same way that they refer patients for dietary advice or therapy.

6. A patient-centered approach should be used to create a plan that is consistent with patient/family values to increase the likelihood of sustained behavior change.

7. Recommendations for activity promotion are based on general recommendations for physical activity for healthy children and adults because only a limited amount of research on physical activity among congenital heart disease patients has been conducted.

8. While some irregular heart beat conditions may require a restriction in physical activity, for most individuals physical activity can be unlimited and should be strongly promoted.

9. Authors provide practices for physical activity assessment and guidance for counseling practices when physical activity restrictions are required, and recommend assessment and monitoring of exercise responses in patients with physical activity-related risk every 3 to 5 years or more often.

10. Research recommendations are made to encourage the development of a robust, evidence-based body of knowledge, including a focus on dose, duration, and intensity of physical activity participation, needed to optimize health outcomes in children and youth whose CHD alters the known physical activity-to-health outcome relationship.

Longmuir PE, et al; on behalf of the American Heart Association Atherosclerosis, Hypertension and Obesity in Youth Committee of the Council on Cardiovascular Disease in the Young. Promotion of physical activity for children and adults with congenital heart disease: a scientific statement from the American Heart Association. Circulation. 2013: published online before print April 29, 2013, 10.1161/CIR.0b013e318293688f.

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