

FACTSHEET

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Fontan circulation, sexual health and pregnancy

This information is designed for use by young people with a Fontan circulation and their families.

Can I have sex?

Yes, when you are ready it is fine from a physical point of view to start a sexual relationship. It is up to you to decide when you are emotionally and mentally ready for a sexual relationship. It is important to take responsibility for your own sexual health by knowing the risks that come with being in a sexual relationship, such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STI's) and how these may affect your health.

How can I prevent pregnancy?

Many forms of birth control are suitable for women with a Fontan circulation. It is important to discuss what option is safest for you with your cardiologist. Oestrogen containing contraceptives (such as the most common type of oral contraceptive pill) should be avoided in many women as these can increase the risk of blood clots. You should discuss the best method of contraception for you with your cardiologist.

How can I prevent sexually transmitted infections?

Just like everyone else in the community it is important to use condoms in addition to other contraception to reduce the risk of STI's.

Can women with a Fontan Circulation have children?

It may be possible for you to have children if you have a Fontan circulation. Some women will be able to fall pregnant and safely deliver a baby. Others may have difficulty becoming pregnant or sustaining a pregnancy as the risk of miscarriage is higher in women that have a Fontan circulation. For some women becoming pregnant may be dangerous to their own health.

It is important to discuss your plans for a family with your cardiologist before you become pregnant. Often there are steps you can take before getting pregnant to make it safer for you and the baby. Planning ahead is important. Women with a Fontan circulation who become pregnant need close monitoring and planning to ensure a safe and healthy pregnancy and delivery. There are specialised obstetricians who work with women who have congenital heart disease.

Is there a risk that my baby will have congenital heart disease?

For the majority of people with congenital heart disease there is a slightly increased chance (less than 3%) that your child will be born with congenital heart disease. The risk is higher if there is a history of genetic abnormalities or a strong family history of congenital heart disease. You should talk to your cardiologist about your specific risk before trying to become pregnant.

Usually it is also recommended that the growing baby of anyone with a Fontan circulation (mum or dad) have an ultrasound of the heart (known as a fetal echocardiogram) during pregnancy. This is a specialised scan performed by a fetal cardiologist where ultrasound is used to look closely at your baby's forming heart. This is in addition to the usual pregnancy ultrasounds.

Contraceptive: A medication used to prevent pregnancy.

Obstetrician: A doctor that specialises in pregnancy.

Fetal Cardiologist: A heart doctor that specialises in diagnosing heart disease in a baby before they are born. They also help plan the treatment the baby will receive after they are born.

Ultrasound: A painless scan that uses sound waves to create images of internal organs.