



Helping Teens with Congenital Heart Disease Transition to Adulthood

In the U.S., about 1 million children are living with congenital heart disease. Many will require specialized follow-up as they grow, especially during the shift from teenage years to adulthood.

Lifelong specialized care results in better outcomes

It's important to help teens with CHD transition from pediatric cardiovascular care to adult CHD treatment centers. Planning this transition usually begins around ages 12-16. The transfer of care is often done between ages 18 and 21. To help shift to a new health care team, it's helpful for young adults with CHD to:

- **Understand their specific heart condition.** This includes knowing the kind of heart defect(s) they have, which surgeries they have had and how their heart is working, and any medications they are on, including how much, how often and why they are taken.
- **Understand how to navigate the health care system.** The American Heart Association can help guide adults with CHD. Contact us at 1-800-AHA-USA-1 or 1-800-242-8721 to get started. Patients can also find information on how to make appointments and communicate with their care team online.
- **Know how to refill prescriptions.** Adults with CHD should know which medications they take and how often they need refills. They should find a pharmacy nearby that can refill their prescriptions. Some online pharmacies can fill multiple months of their supply.
- **Know how health insurance works.** This includes knowing the cost of preventive care to help avoid serious illness that could affect their heart, regular care for ongoing heart conditions and treatment for new health issues, such as chronic disease or injury.

Support for mental health

Mental health support is an important part of overall care. CHD survivors are more likely to have mental health challenges and teenagers can have unique stressors. Health care professionals should regularly check for signs of depression, anxiety, PTSD and thinking or memory problems and refer patients to treatments when needed.

[Heart.org/CHD](https://www.heart.org/CHD)



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A Survivor's Story – Hunter Appleton

Hunter Appleton was 18 months old when he was diagnosed with coarctation of the aorta, a congenital heart defect that restricts blood flow. He had a heart catheterization procedure, and as he grew older, he had open-heart surgery and physical therapy. Today, Hunter is a student at Mississippi State University where he is studying to become a pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon.

