Chest Pain in Children

Parents often worry when their child has any pain in their chest.

While chest pain in adults is frequently caused by serious cardiovascular problems, chest pain in children is often innocent. Research shows less than 1% of chest pain in children stems from the heart itself.

For children with chest pain, pediatric clinicians will take a full history, collect vital signs, and perform a physical examination. Your child may need testing, including a chest radiograph to see inside the chest and an electrocardiogram to look at the heart rhythm. Blood work may also be needed.

Common causes for a child's chest pain that does not stem from the heart can be split into several groups: (1) musculoskeletal, relating to the muscles, bones, and joints (eg, slipping rib syndrome and chest wall inflammation); (2) respiratory, relating to the airways and lungs (eg, asthma and pneumonia); (3) gastrointestinal, relating to the esophagus, stomach, and intestines (eg, acid reflux); (4) psychogenic, relating to the mind (eg, anxiety and panic attacks); and (5) idiopathic, relating to an unknown cause. While many of these causes of chest pain outside of the heart are not dangerous, they may still need evaluation and treatment by your child's health care professional or other specialists.

Features of chest pain in children that may suggest a heart-related cause include chest pain with (1) exercise that gets better with rest; (2) trouble breathing, getting tired easily, and/or chest pressure; (3) passing out or nearly passing out; (4) a history of heart problems at birth or during childhood; (5) a family member who died suddenly or had heart problems in childhood; (6) an abnormal physical examination result, such as a heart murmur; and (7) an abnormal electrocardiogram result.

If a heart-related cause is suspected, your child will need referral to a heart specialist called a pediatric cardiologist. A pediatric cardiologist will repeat a full history and physical examination. They may order an echocardiogram, or heart ultrasonography, to look at the structure and squeeze of the heart. Be reassured that most of these causes of chest pain are not serious, and medical personnel will work with you to understand your child's problem and to provide proper treatment when needed.

Whatever is causing your child's chest pain, the medical team will work with you to understand your child's problem and to provide proper treatment when needed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/heart/Pages/Chest-Pain-in-Children.aspx
https://www.emedicine.net/topics/cardiovascular/pediatric-chest-pain

There are certain characteristics that may suggest chest pain in children is heart related

- Exercise that gets better with rest
- History of heart problems at birth or during childhood
- Trouble breathing
- A family member died suddenly or had heart problems in childhood
- Getting tired easily
- Abnormal physical examination including heart murmur
- Chest pressure
- Abnormal electrocardiogram
- Passing out or nearly passing out
- Related to issues in other systems in the body

Children with these symptoms are referred to a pediatric cardiologist for a full evaluation to rule out any heart conditions including myocarditis, arrhythmia, coronary artery disease, and cardiomyopathy.

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