

Patent Foramen Ovale (PFO)

When a baby is in the womb, there is a normal trap-door type opening between the top chambers of the heart. This opening is there so that the baby's blood that carries the most oxygen can flow to the baby's brain. In most babies, this opening closes soon after birth. It is also common for it not to close until a baby is older.

If the opening does not close, it is called a patent foramen ovale, or PFO. Studies show that 25-30% of adults have a PFO, and most do not know they have it. It is considered normal for children and adults and **not** thought to be a heart abnormality or heart defect.

Signs and Symptoms

It is rare for infants and children with a PFO to have signs or symptoms. A PFO does not cause a heart murmur. Because any blood that flows through the hole is at low pressure, no extra sounds are heard when listening to the heart.

Testing

Usually a PFO is found when looking for something else. A heart ultrasound test called an echocardiogram will show a PFO if it is there.

Treatment

No treatment is needed as a PFO rarely causes any problems.

During certain types of activities, such as deep sea diving, extreme mountain climbing, or space travel, the pressures in the heart could change and a clot could travel across the PFO out to the body. If you do any of these activities, please talk with your primary care provider.

Who Do I Call With Questions?

The doctor or nurse or our clinic staff can answer any questions.

Pediatric Cardiology (608) 263-6420

Adult Congenital Heart Disease (608)

890-5700

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2017. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7362