



SIZWE HOSMED
MEDICAL SCHEME
Your choice for quality care



RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE

Dear Member

Rheumatic heart disease is a condition where the heart valves have been permanently damaged by rheumatic fever.

Rheumatic heart disease starts as a sore throat from a bacterium called *Streptococcus pyogenes* (group A streptococcus), which can pass easily from person to person in the same way as other upper respiratory tract infections. Strep infections are most common in childhood.

In some people, repeated strep infections cause the immune system to react against the tissues of the body, including inflaming and scarring the heart valves. This is what is referred to as rheumatic fever. Rheumatic heart disease results then from the inflammation and scarring of the heart valves caused by rheumatic fever.

This inflammatory disease can develop when strep throat or scarlet fever isn't properly treated.

Rheumatic fever affects children from the ages of 5 to 15 years, but can also affect younger children, as well as adults.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

- Untreated or poorly treated repeated streptococcal throat infections.
- Specific types of streptococcus bacteria: Certain strains of streptococcal bacteria are more likely to contribute to rheumatic fever than other strains.
- Environmental factors: A greater risk of rheumatic fever is associated with overcrowding, poor sanitation and other conditions that can cause strep bacteria to easily spread among people.



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE



- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Swelling
- Fatigue
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat



COMPLICATIONS

A complication of rheumatic fever is permanent damage to the heart valves, which can result in rheumatic heart disease. However, severe rheumatic fever can start to damage the heart valves while your child still has symptoms of the infection.

Other forms of complications from Rheumatic Heart Disease include:

- Heart failure
- Stroke
- Bacterial endocarditis
- Complications of pregnancy and childbirth due to heart damage
- Ruptured heart valve

WHEN SHOULD AN INDIVIDUAL CONSULT A DOCTOR?

You should consult the doctor when the following symptoms occur in you or your child:

- A sore throat that comes on suddenly
- Pain when swallowing
- Fever
- Headache
- Stomach pain, nausea and vomiting
- Fatigue
- Joint pains that are migratory in nature



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF RHEUMATIC FEVER



- Fever
- Painful, tender joints
- Pain in one joint migrating to another joint
- Flat or slightly raised, painless rash with a ragged edge
- Red, hot or swollen joints
- Chest pains
- Fatigue
- Heart murmur
- Jerky, uncomfortable body movements
- Outbursts of unusual behaviour
- Small, painless bumps beneath the skin

PREVENTION

The only way to prevent rheumatic fever is to treat strep throat infections promptly and completely with a full course of the appropriate antibiotics.

Once a patient has been identified as having had rheumatic fever, it is important to prevent additional streptococcal infections as this could cause a further episode of rheumatic fever, with additional damage to the heart valves.

TREATMENT

Rheumatic heart disease can be inhibited by preventing streptococcus infection or treating it with antibiotics when it occurs. It is necessary to take medications as prescribed and complete them according to the instructions, even if you feel healthier after a few days.

Constant monitoring by your healthcare professional is essential to check your heart condition. Depending on the degree of heart damage, surgery may be required.

Treatment also includes taking prescribed antibiotics for an extended period to prevent rheumatic fever.



If you have already been diagnosed with rheumatic heart disease and are not registered on our Active Disease Risk Management (ADRM) programme, kindly register by sending us an email at wellnessqueries@sizwehosmed.co.za or contact our call centre on **0860 103 455**.