

# STS *Congenital*



## Kids With Congenital Heart Disease Face Higher Odds of Mental Health Issues

(I ran across an interesting article from U.S. News yesterday and thought I would share a condensed version)

TUESDAY, Jan. 5, 2021 (HealthDay News) -- Kids born with heart defects may be more likely to develop anxiety, depression and/or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), regardless of the severity of their heart condition.

For the study, the researchers reviewed medical records of close to 119,000 kids, aged 4 to 17, who were treated more than once between 2011 and 2016. Of those, 1,164 had congenital heart disease. All of those youngsters, including the youngest, were more likely than their peers to have anxiety, depression or ADHD, the records revealed. Slightly more than 18% of those who had been born with heart disease had a diagnosis or medication for anxiety and/or depression, compared to just over 5% of others, the researchers found.



Exactly why these children are at higher risk for mental health issues is not fully understood. But the study's lead author described these kids as "uniquely vulnerable." "They are frequently hospitalized and often undergo multiple invasive procedures or surgeries early in childhood and throughout their lifetime. These factors, along with a higher prevalence of underlying genetic disorders, learning disabilities, increased parental anxiety and social stressors all likely contribute to this increase in mental health disorders,"

Nonetheless, kids who are born with heart defects are living longer and fuller lives today than ever before, said Dr. David Meyer, a heart surgeon at Cohen's Children's Hospital in New Hyde Park, N.Y., who reviewed the findings. "We used to focus solely on survival, but now that these kids are doing so well, we need to take a more holistic approach and monitor them for secondary issues that may arise down the road, such as anxiety, depression and or ADHD."

The study also found that uninsured children and those from minority groups are diagnosed with anxiety, depression or ADHD at a strikingly lower rate than their white peers. "This suggests that these populations are at increased risk for being under-diagnosed and treated for these conditions, and providers should have a higher index of suspicion when seeing these patients," Gonzalez said.

Many pediatric heart surgery teams include a psychologist to help children and their families cope with the heart defect, its treatment and its effect on day-to-day life and parents can do their part too "Listen to your child and validate what they are saying and feeling," "Don't make everything about the illness. Try and treat them as a child and include them in normal activities whenever you can."

