

Your heart

<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&id=1446&np=152>

What it looks like

Your heart is about the same size as a pear. It sits behind your ribs on the left side of your body just next to your sternum.

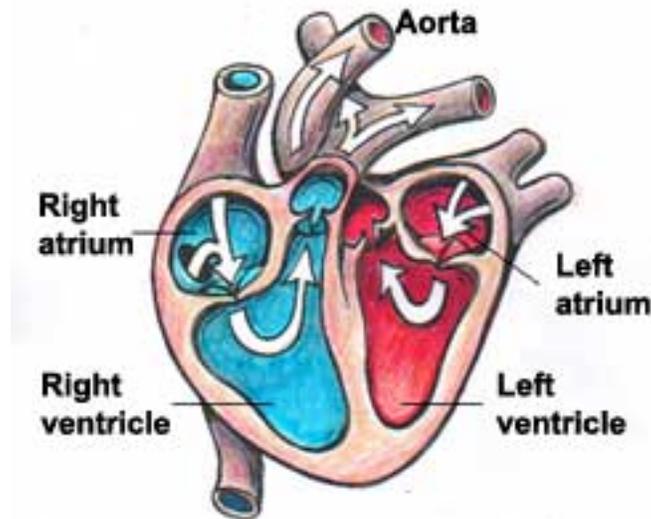
It has four parts, the left ventricle and the right ventricle which are both at the bottom of the heart, and the left atrium and the right atrium at the top. A wall of muscle called the septum separates them.

The heart is two pumps joined together.

What it does

The walls of the heart are made of really strong muscles that squeeze and relax to pump blood around the body.

It does this about 90 times a minute if you're a child and 70 times a minute if you are an adult.



Blood is pushed from the atriums into the ventricles on each side of the heart.

Between them, small valves open and shut with each heartbeat so the blood can only flow in one direction.

The left side of the heart gets the blood from the lungs where it has collected oxygen and pushes it all round the body through the arteries and the tiny blood vessels called capillaries. **This blood is a bright red color.**

The right side of the heart gets the blood after it has taken oxygen round the body and sends it back to the lungs for some more oxygen. This blood is carrying carbon dioxide, which gets

breathed out when it reaches the lungs. **This blood looks a darker red color.** The diagram shows it as blue, but the blood is still a red color even after the oxygen has passed out of the blood into the rest of the body.

So the main job of the heart is to pump blood to every part of the body. The blood carries oxygen and all the food, vitamins and minerals that your body needs to move, think, grow and repair itself. At the same time the blood picks up stuff that your body doesn't need and takes it to those parts of your body that get rid of waste (your lungs, kidneys and liver).

Your blood is pumped all around your body and gets back to your heart in about a minute.

Love your heart

If your heart is healthy it will be able to work for a very long time.

It is up to you to keep your heart healthy.

Your heart will like it if you:

- Exercise every day

You need to exercise your heart by making it work harder for at least 30 minutes a day.



- Eat a healthy diet.

Too much fatty food will block up the arteries with fat and your heart will have to work harder and harder just to do its regular job of pumping blood round your body.

- Drink lots of water every day instead of soda.
- Spend less time sitting still. Take a break while watching TV, playing computer games or doing your homework. Get up from your seat and move around.



- Make good choices as you grow older. You can choose **not** to smoke, **not to take illegal drugs** and **not** to drink too much alcohol.



What is a heart murmur?

When your heart is working normally it sounds quiet and smooth.

- It's like a tap which is turned on enough for the water to flow quietly and smoothly. If you turn the tap onto full then the water becomes more turbulent (mixed up) and the sound gets louder.

A heart murmur in young children can happen when the heart beats quite fast. This can happen when the child has a fever or after exercise. The blood flow gets faster and noisier.

This is not a health problem.

A **heart murmur can be a sign of a health problem** when there is a hole between two parts of the heart and the blood is coming from two directions at once, mixing together and causing turbulence and your doctor can hear it.

This type of heart murmur may be a problem. It depends on how much blood is going in the wrong direction.

- There may need to be an operation to block off the hole as the blood may not be able to pick up enough oxygen from the lungs to take it all round the body.
- This can mean that kids get tired easily and may not be able to do sport or exercise. It can also sometimes mean that the body cannot grow tall and strong.

If you have a heart murmur and the doctor doesn't think that there is a problem, then don't worry about it.

It shouldn't stop you from doing anything.

So, get out there and start joining in. Your heart needs the exercise.

