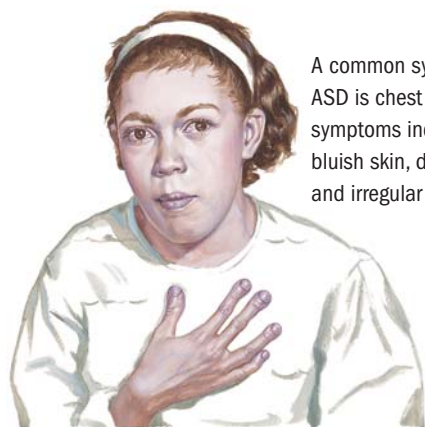
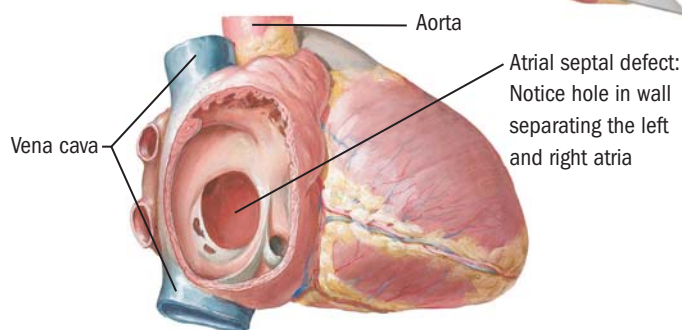
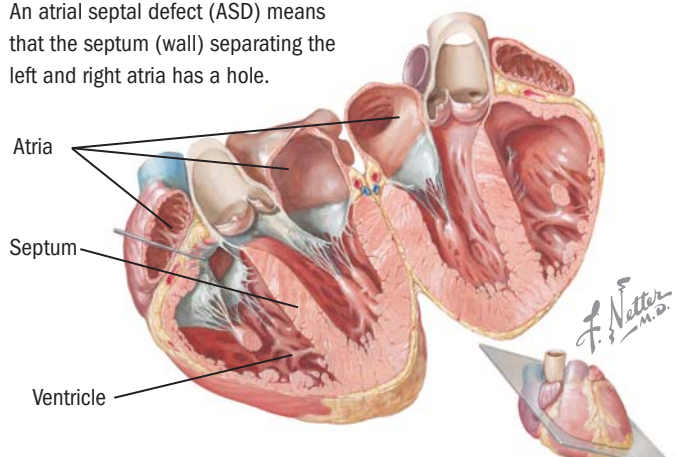
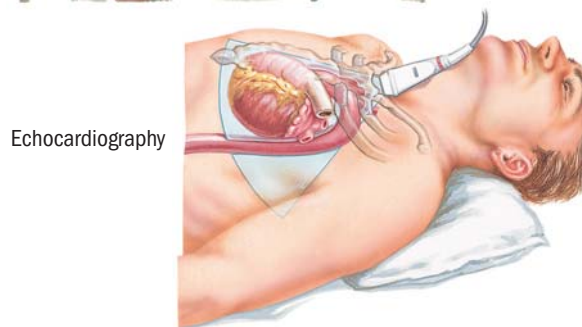


MANAGING YOUR ATRIAL SEPTAL DEFECT

An atrial septal defect (ASD) means that the septum (wall) separating the left and right atria has a hole.



A common symptom of severe ASD is chest pain. Other symptoms include weakness, bluish skin, difficulty breathing, and irregular heartbeat.



Echocardiography

To diagnose your problem, your doctor may want to do electrocardiography (ECG) and echocardiography (ultrasound of the heart) and recommend consultation with a heart specialist.

What Is Atrial Septal Defect?

The atria are the top chambers of the heart that send blood to the ventricles (bottom chambers). A septum is a wall separating the left and right sides of these chambers. An atrial septal defect (ASD) is an inborn (congenital) heart condition. It is a hole in the septum separating the left and right atria. The left side of the heart normally pumps under higher pressure than the right side. The defect produces a left-to-right shunt that allows blood from the two sides of the heart to mix. Blood with less oxygen is pumped to the body, and oxygenated blood travels back to the lungs. Abnormal circulation on the right side of the system causes increased pressure in the lungs (pulmonary hypertension).

ASD is more common in girls than boys. Some defects close as a child grows, but others may last into adulthood. ASD is the most common congenital heart defect diagnosed in adults. ASD cannot be prevented.

What Causes Atrial Septal Defect?

The cause is unknown. ASD develops before birth and may last into adulthood. ASD is more common in children with Down syndrome. The most common type of ASD, consisting of a small opening, is called a patent (open) foramen ovale (PFO).

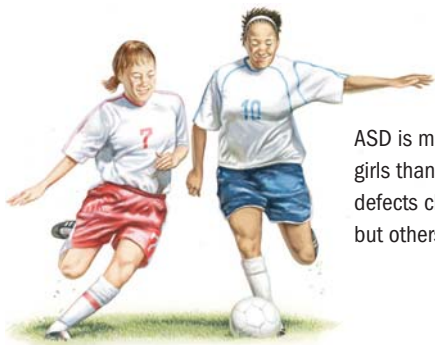
What Are the Symptoms of Atrial Septal Defect?

Small defects may not cause a problem.

A large hole may produce weakness, breathing difficulties, chest pain, bluish skin color, and abnormal heartbeats (arrhythmias). Larger defects eventually overload the system controlled by the right side of the heart, possibly causing heart failure (inefficient pumping).

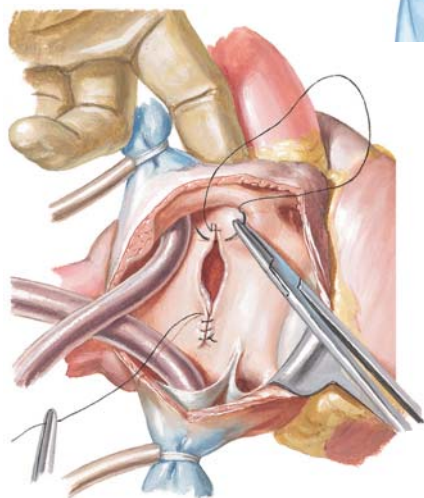
How Is Atrial Septal Defect Diagnosed?

The doctor may suspect the diagnosis on the basis of symptoms and findings at physical examination (heart murmur). An electrocardiogram (ECG) may show abnormalities. A chest x-ray may be abnormal, showing enlarged lung blood vessels and an enlarged heart. An echocardiogram (a test using ultrasound) can check the heart's structure and pumping and measure blood flow. The doctor may also recommend going to a cardiologist (a doctor who specializes in heart diseases) for more tests.



ASD is more common among girls than among boys. Some defects close as the child grows, but others may last into adulthood.

ASD is the most common congenital heart defect diagnosed among adults.



Surgery to fix the hole is the preferred treatment and is generally done at about the age of 4 years. A return to normal life can be expected in a few weeks to a few months after surgery.

People with ASD may be referred to a cardiologist.



Sometimes, people take medicine to treat symptoms.



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NOTES

How Is Atrial Septal Defect Treated?

People with very small defects or defects that close may never have symptoms and need no treatment. People who need treatment may be referred to a cardiologist. Medicine may also be given to treat symptoms. If the defect lasts, symptoms may develop that require treatment to correct the defect. Surgery is the preferred treatment and is usually done around the age of 4 years. If there is no other heart disease, correcting the defect usually allows a normal life span and lifestyle.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Atrial Septal Defect:

- ✓ **DO** take medicines as prescribed by your doctor.
- ✓ **DO** exercise, if your doctor says to do so.
- ✓ **DO** follow your doctor's advice to make sure you have full recovery and return to a normal life.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have such symptoms as shortness of breath, irregular heartbeat, chest pain, or bluish discoloration of your fingers.

- ⊘ **DON'T** ignore worsening symptoms. Get medical attention immediately.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Heart Association
Tel: (800) 242-8721
Website: <http://www.americanheart.org>
- Congenital Heart Information Network
Tel: (215) 627-4034
Fax: (215) 627-4036
E-mail: mb@tchin.org
Website: <http://www.tchin.org>