

# CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE & DRIVING

*Patient and Family Information*



## WHAT IS CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE?

Congenital heart disease — or CHD — is the most common birth defect that affects the heart's structural integrity. CHD is often diagnosed in infants but can also be diagnosed before birth or as late as adulthood.

Environmental and genetic factors are linked to CHD, although the causes of most cases are unknown. Your CHD symptoms are dependent on four primary factors:

1. The type and severity of your heart defect
2. Any past corrective procedures you may have undergone
3. Medications you have taken or may still be taking
4. Your current medical treatments

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT DRIVING AND YOUR CHD?

Learning how to drive is an important milestone for many teens and young adults. All new drivers need to know how their health conditions may affect their ability to drive safely. The effects of CHD on your everyday activities may transfer over to your driving abilities. Being aware of this can help increase your safety behind the wheel.

## HOW CAN CHD AFFECT YOUR DRIVING?

While not much research has been done on CHD and driving specifically, the condition may impact your driving in the following ways:

- Executive functions, such as your ability to control automatic responses or inhibitions, can be affected. If you are a driver with this type of impairment, you may be less able to process and prioritize information, as well as control your impulsivity and resist distractions on the road or inside the car.

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- Your visual-spatial ability may be affected. This ability impacts your reaction time and is essential to driving skills such as safe maneuvering.
- Many people with CHD are also diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD can affect your attention span, impulsiveness and judgment while driving, which may lead to increased crash risk and citations for traffic violations.
- CHD can affect some of the fine and gross motor skills needed to drive safely such as:
  - moving your feet and legs to correctly apply the gas and brake
  - moving your hands and arms to safely operate the steering wheel
  - turning your body and neck to check blind spots and mirrors

## HOW CAN YOU BE A SAFER DRIVER?

Even though CHD can affect driving performance, there are ways you can develop safer driving skills, including:

- Follow your medical treatment guidelines
- Review resources for teens and families on their driving journey, developed by experts at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, at [teendriversource.research.chop.edu](https://teendriversource.research.chop.edu) or scan the QR code below
- Contact a local driver training program for classroom and/or behind-the-wheel driver education
- Contact a local Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist who has training in working with individuals with CHD and neurodevelopmental differences, such as ADHD, to address the following factors as they relate specifically to driving:
  - executive functions
  - attention
  - visual-spatial skills
  - motor skills



You can search for a local specialist at [www.aded.net](http://www.aded.net).

### RESOURCE | Teen Driver Source

Get free teen driver safety information and downloadable resources, including parent-supervised driving lessons and videos from Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia experts.



*Scan QR code*