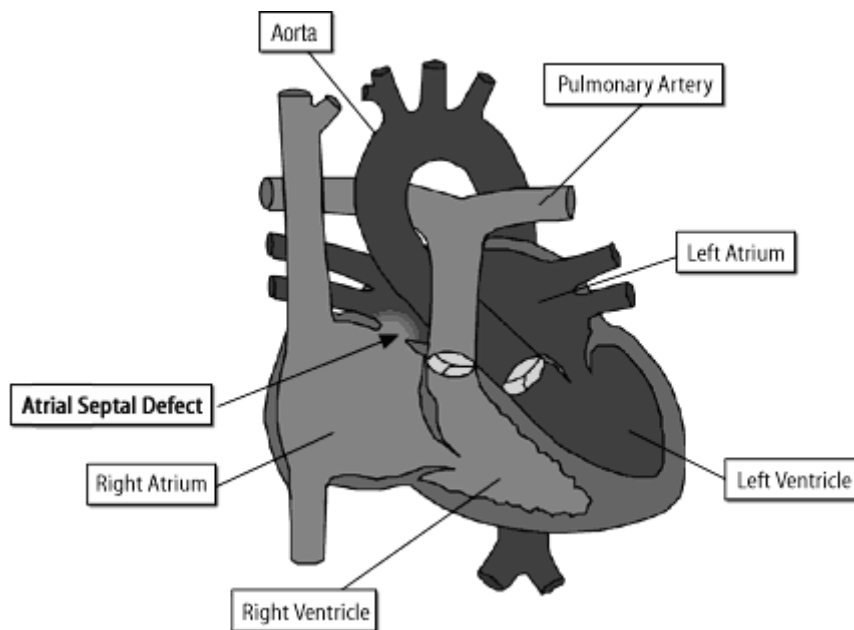


A Hole in the Heart

When you hear the term “A Hole in the Heart”, you may initially think of your first heart break as a teenager. However, a hole in the heart is actually a serious heart condition. The most common congenital hole is called an Atrial Septal Defect (ASD) and is a hole between the top two heart chambers. It occurs two to three times more frequently in females. These defects are rarely detected in the first years of life because of the lack of symptoms. Later in life, almost all patients with ASD’s develop symptoms, usually in their thirties or forties. These symptoms range from fatigue, shortness of breath, palpitations, and congestive heart failure. The leading cause of death in patients with an ASD is congestive heart failure.



Patients are typically diagnosed once they begin to develop symptoms. Often, a heart murmur is detected and cardiac echocardiography (ultrasound) performed. This allows you to actually see the hole. Most ASD’s should be closed, because of the association with reduced survival. This is accomplished either by surgery or with catheters. Historically, ASD’s have required open heart surgery where the hole is sutured closed or a patch is used. Alternatively, most holes can now be closed with a much less invasive catheter based approach. This entails making a small hole in the vein in the leg and feeding a catheter through the hole in the heart. A closure device is then placed across the hole under ultrasound guidance. The device closes the hole, thereby relieving the strain on the heart. Due to its less invasive nature, transcatheter closure of ASD’s is now becoming the preferred method of closure, by patients and physicians alike. ASD is a serious condition that with today’s advances in medicine can be treated and fixed more easily than ever before. As for your first broken heart, you’re on your own.

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