

# When to See a Cardiologist

## What is a cardiologist?

A cardiologist is a doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating heart diseases. After 4 years of medical school, these doctors take from 6 to 8 more years of special training. Some cardiologists work only with adults, and others work only with children.

## What do cardiologists do?

You may be referred to a cardiologist when serious heart problems are suspected. Cardiologists help find out if you have a heart disease and help you decide how best to treat it. There are different kinds of cardiologists:

- Some interpret specialized heart tests. Examples of these tests are echocardiograms, electrocardiograms, and exercise treadmill tests.
- Some do cardiac catheterizations, echocardiograms, and electrophysiology studies.
- Some do procedures to repair heart problems. Examples of this kind of procedure are angioplasty, radiofrequency ablation, and putting in pacemakers.

When a cardiologist finds a problem that is best treated with surgery, you will be referred to a heart surgeon. Cardiovascular surgeons repair or replace heart valves and do bypass surgeries. Some do heart transplants.

## When are cardiologists needed?

If you are at high risk of a heart problem because of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes, your primary care provider (PCP) will usually manage your care. Your PCP can help you exercise more, lose weight, and stop smoking. PCPs can also order tests and manage health problems not related to the heart. When your PCP thinks you need special testing, you might be referred to a specialist.

If a heart problem is serious enough for you to be in the hospital, such as a heart attack, severe heart failure, or a heart rhythm problem, you will usually see a specialist. After you leave the hospital and your condition is stable, you may not need to see the cardiologist any longer.

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