

UNDERSTANDING Patent Ductus Arteriosus

PDA



What is the ductus arteriosus?

Before birth, there is no need for a baby to breathe. The baby gets oxygen from the placenta. A small blood vessel in the baby's heart allows blood to bypass (skip) the lungs and go straight to the rest of the body. This blood vessel is called the **ductus arteriosus** [duck-tus ar-tear-ee-oh-sis].

At birth, a baby starts to breathe. Oxygen now comes from the baby's own lungs. The ductus arteriosus is no longer needed. It usually closes within days of birth.

What is PDA?

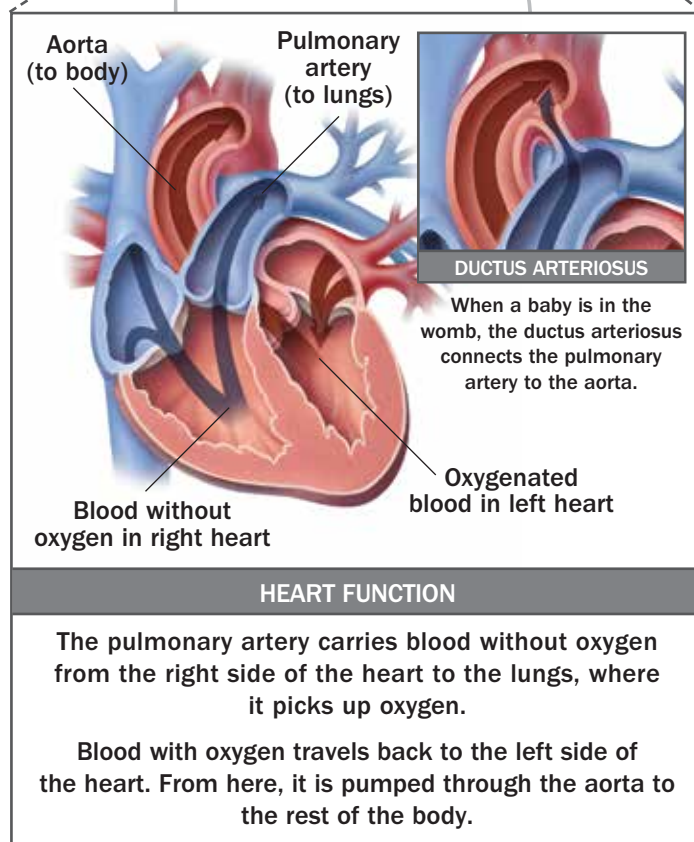
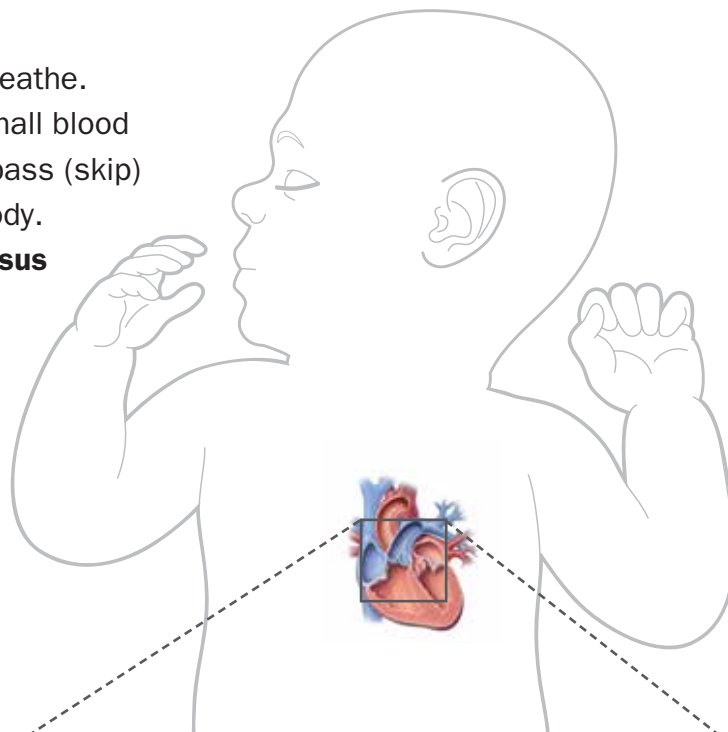
In some babies, the ductus arteriosus does not close soon after birth. This is called **patent ductus arteriosus**, or **PDA**. In the case of PDA, patent means open.

In some babies, PDA does not cause any problems. The size of the vessel is important.

- A small PDA only allows a little blood to pass through it. This may not cause any problems.
- Larger PDAs allow more blood to go back to the lungs instead of out to the rest of the body. This can increase blood pressure in the lungs. This also makes the baby's heart work harder.

How common is PDA?

PDA is more common in premature or low-birth-weight babies. Almost half of all babies weighing less than 3 lbs, 13 oz at birth will have this problem. Smaller babies are even more likely to have a PDA. It is also twice as common in girls as it is in boys.



PDA is a **congenital heart defect**. It is present at birth.

