Health Facts for You

UW Health

Patent Foramen Ovale (PFO)

When a baby is in the womb, there is a trap-door type opening between the top chambers of the heart. This opening is there so the baby's blood that carries the most oxygen can flow to the baby's brain. In most babies, this opening closes soon after birth. It is also common for it not to close until they are older.

If the opening does not close, it is called a patent foramen ovale, or PFO. Studies show that 25-30% of adults have a PFO, and do not know it. It is normal for children and adults. It is **not** felt to be abnormal or a heart defect.

Signs and Symptoms
It is rare for infants and children with a PFO to have any signs. A PFO does not cause a heart murmur. Any blood that flows through the hole is at low pressure, so no extra sounds are heard.

Testing
A PFO is most often found when looking for something else. An ultrasound, called an echocardiogram can show a PFO.

Treatment
No treatment is needed as a PFO rarely causes any problems in young people.

Who to Call
Pediatric Cardiology
(608) 263-6420

Adult Congenital Heart Disease
(608) 890-5700

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.