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heart of a child

Roach awaiting second open-heart surgery as national observance spotlights congenital heart disease

By HINA ALAM
The Lufkin Daily News

Saturday, February 03, 2007

He's similar to other 3-year-olds. Like them, he too likes to play with toy trucks.

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He carries toy truck parts and toy motorbikes around in his green John Deere lunch box.



Joel Andrews/The Lufkin Daily News (ENLARGE)

Jennifer Roach's son, Carsyn Walker Roach, 3, had open heart surgery when he was 2 years old, and will have surgery again on his heart this summer after he turns 4.

release from The Congenital Heart Information Network.

"It is very common," says Dr. Julio Williams, a cardiovascular surgeon from the Cardio-Thoracic Institute of East Texas. And these congenital heart defects can be due to any number of reasons, including things out of anyone's control — such as genetics — as well as some things people can control — such as smoking or drinking during pregnancy and lack of pre-natal care, Williams says.

But science and technology have advanced so much that even though these kids might have to go for regular checkups, they can lead healthy and normal lives as adults, Williams says.

In Carsyn's case, when Jennifer and his dad, Chad Roach, brought him home from the hospital in April 2003, "he was five weeks premature, but he seemed perfectly normal," she says. "He was a beautiful baby boy."

Then the parents noticed a few minor problems, such as reflux and a weakened immune system.

"I took him to so many doctors because they just couldn't figure out what was wrong with him, and I knew that something just wasn't right," Jennifer says. "He had slow weight gain, frequent illnesses and occasionally looked pale or blueish."

He likes chicken nuggets, corn dogs and red velvet cake.

"Na-na makes it best," he says.

Carsyn Walker Roach is only a little different from other 3-year-olds.

This golden-haired, dimple-cheeked bundle of mischief had open heart surgery when he was 2 years old, and will have surgery again on his heart this summer after he turns 4. He may have to have two more surgeries as well as regular checkups every year.

"That was a long day," says Jennifer Roach, his mother, of the last time Carsyn had surgery in June of 2005. "It was a nine-hour surgery ... It started at 11 a.m."

Carsyn doesn't know much about his surgery, or why he had to have it.

But he's the perfect example of why there is an observance this week to mark National Congenital Heart Disease Week, and of February as National Heart Month.

An estimated one in every 100 children born in the United States each year is born with some kind of heart defect, making it the most common birth defect, according to a press

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Dr. Jeffrey Glass of Lufkin was the one to first notice Carsyn's heart problem, Jennifer says. "We finally found a pediatrician that seemed to understand where we were coming from," she says. "He was also the first doctor to notice that Carsyn had a heart murmur."

By April 2005, Dr. Glass discovered Carsyn's heart murmur sounded different than before. After a long list of tests, it was determined Carsyn had an atrial septal defect, ventricular septal defect, mitral valve regurgitation and possible sub-aortic narrowing.

The June 2005 open-heart surgery corrected the problems. But in December 2006, a routine checkup found Carsyn had a regrowth of the sub-aortic narrowing, for which he will have another open-heart surgery this summer to correct.

In the meantime, Carsyn is a very normal boy, Jennifer says. "He enjoys hanging out with his younger brother Weston, playing outside, riding and 'working' on his dad's Jeep."

When he grows up, Carsyn's mom says, he has told her he wants to become a pediatric cardiologist like Dr. Glass, and drive around in an 18-wheeler like Pa-Pa (grandfather Oscar Roach, a trucker) does.

On Thursday, dressed in khakis and a red and blue T-shirt, this 3-year-old sits in a red chair with the newspaper spread out in his lap. He opens to the weather page. "It can be cold tomorrow," he says.

His mother bursts into laughter. She describes him as "rambunctious."

Like most 3-year-olds, he likes candy.

He's been known to throw a tantrum or two.

Just like any other 3-year-old. Only a little different.

Donations can be made to several organizations to help fund Congenital Heart Disease research. Check the Web site at <http://tchin.org/carsyn>.

CONGENITAL HEART DEFECTS

Parents should be alert to the following symptoms of congenital heart defects in infancy:

- * Tires easily during feeding (i.e., falls asleep before feeding finishes)
- * Sweating around the head, especially during feeding
- * Fast breathing when at rest or sleeping
- * Pale or bluish skin color
- * Poor weight gain
- * Sleeps a lot — not playful or curious for any length of time
- * Puffy face, hands, and/or feet

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- * Often irritable, difficult to console

Some children with CHDs may not have any symptoms until later in childhood. Things to look for include:

- * Gets out of breath during play

- * Difficulty "keeping up" with playmates

- * Tires easily/sleeps a lot

- * Change in color during active play or sports (looks pale or has a bluish tint around mouth and nose)

- * Frequent colds and respiratory illnesses

- * Slow growth and weight gain/poor appetite

- * Complains of chest pain and/or heart pounding

|From The Congenital Heart |Information Network (www.tchin.org)

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