

# The Heart!

The heart is a powerful muscle which expands and contracts to pump blood to every part of the body. Everyone's heart is pear-shaped and about the size of a closed fist. As we grow, it will also grow in size. The heart is located in the middle of the chest, just behind the breastbone.

The heart is divided into two chambers. The left chamber, which is larger, pumps blood to the entire body. The right chamber, which is smaller, pumps blood only to the lungs.

Each of these chambers is divided into two smaller chambers. The upper sections are called *auricles* and the lower sections are called *ventricles*.

Blood vessels, called *arteries* carry the blood away from the heart. They expand and contract with the heart as the blood is pumped through the body.

From the arteries, the blood flows into *capillaries*, which are tiny tubes throughout the body. Anytime you have scraped your knee or pricked your finger, you have punctured a capillary.

The capillaries are then joined with tiny tubes called *veins* which unite with larger veins in the body to return the blood to the heart. This starts the blood flow all over again.

An adult's heart beats about 70 to 80 times a minute. It pumps over 2,500 gallons of blood each day.

Teach your kids to take their pulse. Show them how their pulse will increase with exercise and decrease with rest. Ask students to do the following:

1. Using the tips of your fingers, locate your pulse on either your wrist or neck.
2. Ask a friend to time you for 20 seconds while you count the number of times your heart beats.
3. How many times did your heart beat in 20 seconds? (Multiply this number by three to find out how many times your heart beats in a minute.)
4. Now, jog in place for a few minutes. This will speed up your heart rate.
5. Ask your friend to time you again. How many times did your heart beat in 20 seconds, this time? How many beats per minute?

Exercise makes your heart work faster and harder. It also helps your heart to become stronger and more efficient. There are many things you can do to keep your heart healthy and strong. It is important to get plenty of exercise, at least nine or ten hours of sleep every night, and eat a well-balanced diet.

