

A Congenital Heart Defect Doesn't Slow Him Down

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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When you tune in to watch snowboarder Shaun White compete in the Olympics, you will see one of the most accomplished athletes in his sport going for his third gold-medal with his usual display of tricks and speed.

What you won't see is the congenital heart defect he was born with slowing him down. White, 31, was born with tetralogy of fallot (TOF) with pulmonary atresia – the same thing comedian Jimmy Kimmel's son was diagnosed with shortly after birth in May 2017.

A baby born with TOF will generally have lower oxygen levels than a typical baby because they are born with a particular combination of heart defects.

White had three surgeries as an infant and while he was aware of his condition, his parents never stopped him from achieving his dreams.

SOT DR. TREY JANTZEN (Pediatric Cardiologist – OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois)

(Most of the kids that have congenital heart disease that you do surgery on don't require any restrictions in the future when it comes to sports and athletics and so we would allow them to do whatever it is that they're able to do to their utmost ability :15)

Dr. Trey Jantzen is a Pediatric Cardiologist. He says TOF is one of the most common heart defects where a child is born with low oxygen levels and is a good example of how doctors can do an operation early on which enables a child to do what they want to do as they get older.

Statistics show 18 out of 10,000 babies are born with some type of congenital heart defect.

Dr. Cecilia Albaro is Director of Fetal Echocardiography at OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois. She says doing sonograms and early screenings to detect potential heart defects while the baby is still in the womb can allow time to prepare for whatever treatment, including surgery, is necessary after birth. She says it also allows for important conversations to take place with parents ahead of time.

Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) can also be detected using pulse oximetry screening. Newborns with cardiac defects can appear healthy at birth, but can deteriorate rapidly or die. It is a requirement in the state of Illinois that birthing facilities do pulse oximetry screening after 24 hours of life.

While children born with CHD require regular check-ups and may need additional procedures later in life, for both Doctors Albaro and Jantzen, Olympian Shaun White is an example of encouraging a person with CHD to achieve their potential, no matter what that is.

SOT Dr. CECILIA ALBARO (Fetal Echocardiography Director, OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois)

(Often it comes up in conversation families will ask, "well, can my child participate in sports?" And we don't know what the future holds, here is some hope, there is this young man who is an Olympic athlete and he has a complex heart defect :16)

SOT DR. TREY JANTZEN (Pediatric Cardiologist – OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois)

(He's a great example for any child that has a congenital heart defect for what the potential is for them in the future. I would say any child that if you could just encourage them from either an academic or athletic standpoint to fulfill their potential he's certainly a good example of that :16)

Learn more about the Congenital Heart Center at [OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois](https://www.osfhealthcare.org/childrens-hospital-of-illinois).