

What Am I?

Here's a riddle for you to answer: I am an important part of your body. I am a muscle that works all the time. I am a kind of pump. What am I? **If you answered "heart," you are right!**



Put your hand on the middle of your chest, about halfway down. What do you feel? The first thing you will feel is some bones. These are your ribs and breastbone. Your heart is inside your ribs. It is protected by these bones. Sit quietly and hold your hand on your chest for a minute. Do you feel your heart beating?

Thump—thump—thump.

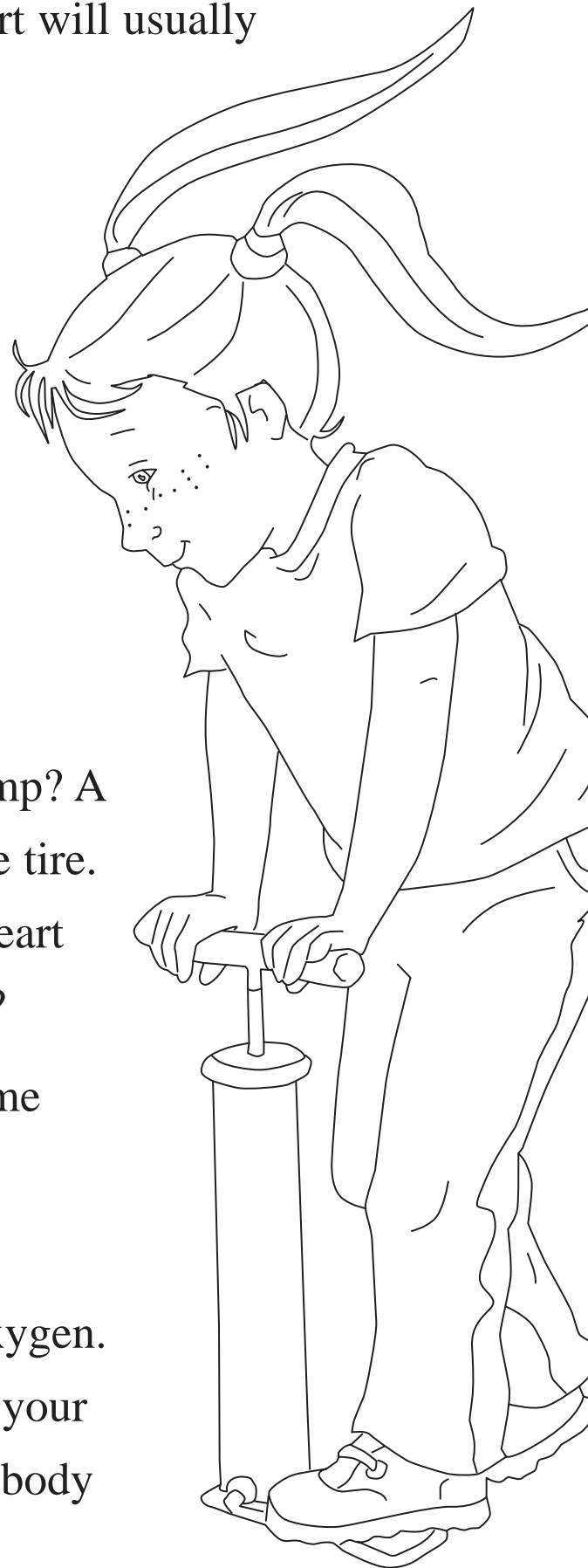
It beats all the time. A grown person's heart beats about 70 times each minute. Your heart will usually beat a little faster.

Your heart is a muscle. Some muscles in your body work when you want to make them work. You can make your arm muscles help you throw a ball. But your heart is a muscle that works all the time. It works without you making it or even thinking about it.

Have you ever used a bicycle pump? A bicycle pump pushes air into a bicycle tire. Your heart is a pump, too. But your heart doesn't pump air. What does it pump?

Your heart pumps blood. Each time your heart pumps or beats, it pushes blood to every part of your body.

Every part of your body needs oxygen. Your blood carries oxygen all around your body. The blood travels through your body in tubes called blood vessels.



The next time you are doing something active, stop and put your hand on your chest. Do you feel your heart beating under your ribs? Your heart will beat faster when you have been running or jumping. When you rest, it will beat more slowly.

Now put the fingers of your right hand on the inside of your left wrist below your thumb. You can feel your blood move as it is pumped by your heart. That is your pulse.

When you get a checkup by a doctor, the doctor will use a stethoscope to listen to your heart. Maybe the doctor will let you listen to your heart through the stethoscope!

Thump—thump—thump.

It is a good idea to take care of your heart. Learning about your heart and what it needs can help keep you healthy now and when you are grown up, too.

