# Emma Willis reveals she had keyhole surgery to close a previously undetected hole in her heart



Emma Willis has revealed she underwent surgery to close a hole in her heart after the condition — a form of congenital heart disease — was picked up only in adulthood. The 49‑year‑old television presenter told viewers on This Morning that the discovery, made after a cardiology appointment about cholesterol, sparked immediate alarm: “You find something out like that and you go ‘oh my goodness what does it mean,’” she said, adding that a late‑night session with “doctor Google” magnified her anxiety. According to the original report, the operation took place at London’s Royal Brompton Hospital.

Willis said the diagnosis followed a string of checks last year, during which clinicians noted an enlarged heart before a cardiologist identified the structural defect. Speaking on television about the moment she learned the news, she described a spiralling thought process that led to panic and sleepless nights. The procedure itself was carried out by a specialist team: the presenter publicly thanked her surgeons and posted from hospital about the care she received, praising the clinicians who treated her.

Her surgeon, Dr Ee Ling Heng, told This Morning that congenital heart defects present in very different ways depending on the size and location of the abnormality — some people will be unaware of a defect for years, while others experience symptoms early. Hospital and professional profiles show Dr Heng is a consultant cardiologist at Royal Brompton & Harefield with specialist expertise in adult congenital heart disease and structural interventional procedures, including percutaneous closure of septal defects. Media coverage of Willis’s case described the operation as a minimally invasive, keyhole procedure that plugged the defect and reduced episodes of palpitations, while also noting the team’s wider expertise in cardiac imaging and interventional cardiology.

Public health guidance underlines why cases like Willis’s can still come as a shock. The NHS states congenital heart disease is one of the most common birth defects in the UK — affecting almost one in 100 babies — and covers a broad spectrum from small septal (hole) defects that may be asymptomatic for years to more complex malformations. Typical signs that warrant medical review include breathlessness, chest pain, fainting with exertion, a bluish tinge to the skin or lips, palpitations and swelling in the limbs or abdomen, though many mild defects only come to light through imaging or incidental findings.

Willis has been candid about the psychological aspect of recovery. In an interview with The Sun she said: “I’m a brilliant overthinker, and my mind will go in every possible direction and scenario, so going into something like surgery, I really got myself at it… It’s been much more of a psychological adjustment, because you don’t have a wound that you can see.” Other reports and her social posts describe a supportive presence from family — her husband was by her side — and gratitude for the medical team, whom she thanked for their care and skill.

Specialist cardiologists stress that treatment and follow‑up depend on the individual defect. Some septal holes close spontaneously or are amenable to catheter‑based closure without open‑heart surgery; others require different interventions and lifelong surveillance by a congenital heart service. Royal Brompton’s teaching and research profile emphasises this multidisciplinary approach, with consultant cardiologists involved in both procedural work and longer‑term outcome studies.

Willis’s experience has prompted a familiar message from clinicians and patient groups: modern cardiac imaging and minimally invasive treatments mean many congenital defects identified in adulthood can be effectively managed, but anyone experiencing relevant symptoms should seek assessment from their GP or a cardiology service. The case also highlights the emotional as well as the clinical dimensions of discovering a previously undetected heart condition, and the importance of specialist follow‑up as the heart adjusts after corrective procedures.

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## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/emma-willis-heart-surgery-this-morning-hole-b2806796.html), [[2]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/emma-willis-heart-surgery-this-morning-hole-b2806796.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/emma-willis-heart-surgery-this-morning-hole-b2806796.html), [[6]](https://www.hellomagazine.com/celebrities/839186/emma-willis-heart-surgery-forever-side-effect/), [[7]](https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/reality-tv/a64573106/emma-willis-surgery-hole-heart/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/emma-willis-heart-surgery-this-morning-hole-b2806796.html), [[4]](https://www.rbhh-education.co.uk/instructor/ee-ling-heng/), [[5]](https://www.topdoctors.co.uk/doctor/ee-ling-heng), [[6]](https://www.hellomagazine.com/celebrities/839186/emma-willis-heart-surgery-forever-side-effect/), [[7]](https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/reality-tv/a64573106/emma-willis-surgery-hole-heart/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/congenital-heart-disease/), [[1]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/emma-willis-heart-surgery-this-morning-hole-b2806796.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/emma-willis-heart-surgery-this-morning-hole-b2806796.html), [[6]](https://www.hellomagazine.com/celebrities/839186/emma-willis-heart-surgery-forever-side-effect/), [[2]](https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/emma-willis-heart-surgery-this-morning-hole-b2806796.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.rbhh-education.co.uk/instructor/ee-ling-heng/), [[5]](https://www.topdoctors.co.uk/doctor/ee-ling-heng), [[3]](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/congenital-heart-disease/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.hellomagazine.com/celebrities/839186/emma-willis-heart-surgery-forever-side-effect/), [[7]](https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/reality-tv/a64573106/emma-willis-surgery-hole-heart/), [[3]](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/congenital-heart-disease/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/emma-willis-heart-surgery-this-morning-hole-b2806796.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.the-independent.com/life-style/emma-willis-heart-surgery-this-morning-hole-b2806796.html> - Emma Willis revealed she underwent heart surgery after doctors found a previously undetected hole in her heart, a form of congenital heart disease. The 49-year-old described panicking after the diagnosis, which followed a cardiology appointment about cholesterol and earlier checks that suggested an enlarged heart. Speaking on This Morning with her surgeon Dr Ee Ling Heng, she explained how online searches intensified her anxiety. The procedure took place at Royal Brompton Hospital in London. Dr Heng noted that symptoms vary according to defect size. The article cites NHS prevalence figures and recounts Willis’s comments to The Sun about her recovery.
3. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/congenital-heart-disease/> - The NHS explains congenital heart disease is a broad term for birth defects affecting heart structure and is one of the most common birth defects in the UK, affecting almost one in 100 babies. It lists types such as septal defects (holes between chambers), coarctation and valve problems. Symptoms can range from breathlessness, chest pain and tiredness to cyanosis, fainting or swelling, though mild defects may be asymptomatic for years. Diagnosis may occur before birth via ultrasound or later with imaging. Treatment depends on severity: some defects resolve, while others need interventional procedures or surgery and lifelong specialist follow-up care.
4. <https://www.rbhh-education.co.uk/instructor/ee-ling-heng/> - Dr Ee Ling Heng is profiled on Royal Brompton & Harefield Hospitals’ education pages as a consultant cardiologist specialising in adult congenital heart disease and structural interventional procedures. The profile highlights her expertise in percutaneous treatments including atrial septal defect and patent foramen ovale closures, valve interventions and cardiac imaging. It notes her training at Imperial College and a PhD focusing on congenital heart outcomes, plus fellowships including Toronto General Hospital. Dr Heng is described as part of the specialist ACHD and structural heart teams at Royal Brompton and Harefield, contributing to teaching, research and minimally invasive procedures for patients.
5. <https://www.topdoctors.co.uk/doctor/ee-ling-heng> - Top Doctors lists Dr Ee Ling Heng as a consultant cardiologist based in London with expertise in adult congenital heart disease and structural interventions. Her professional profile summarises qualifications including an MBBS and PhD, Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS affiliation and private practice at The Cardiac Clinic. The entry emphasises her experience with atrial septal defect closure, mitral and tricuspid interventions, cardiac MRI and interventional cardiology techniques. It mentions research publications, teaching roles and positions on editorial boards. Contact and booking information reflect her dual NHS and private practice and recognition as a specialist in ASD care for patients nationwide.
6. <https://www.hellomagazine.com/celebrities/839186/emma-willis-heart-surgery-forever-side-effect/> - Hello! reports Emma Willis underwent keyhole heart surgery in March after doctors discovered a hole in her heart that had gone unnoticed for decades. The article describes how the former Big Brother presenter posted images on Instagram from Royal Brompton Hospital thanking the medical team and praising her surgeon Dr Ee Ling Heng. She told radio hosts that the operation plugged the defect and reduced palpitations, though she warned palpitations might persist as her heart relearns to function without the hole. Hello! notes her husband Matt Willis stayed by her side and quotes her reflections on modern medicine and recovery.
7. <https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/reality-tv/a64573106/emma-willis-surgery-hole-heart/> - Digital Spy reports Emma Willis revealed she had surgery to correct a hole in her heart after spending 48 years unaware of the defect. The piece recounts her social media post from Royal Brompton Hospital thanking clinicians including Dr Alexander Lyon and Wei Li for their care. It explains the condition is a septal defect, commonly called a hole in the heart, and notes such problems can be asymptomatic or cause palpitations, breathlessness and fatigue. The article highlights Willis’s gratitude for medical techniques and her amazement at the skill of the team who performed a minimally invasive closure in hospital.