

# Healing for Heart Valve Disease

Overcoming Heart Valve Disease With Specialized Care





## What Are Your Heart Valves?

Your heart valves are thin flaps of tissue that act as one-way doors, letting blood flow out from the heart in the right direction. With each beat of your heart, your valves open to allow blood to empty from your heart's chambers, and then close, so that blood doesn't go back into the chambers.

Your heart has four valves, one for each chamber of your heart. Your mitral valve and tricuspid valve are in between the atria (your upper heart chambers) and the ventricles (your lower heart chambers). Your aortic valve and pulmonic valve are between the ventricles and major blood vessels leaving your heart.



# How Your Heart Valves Work in Every Heartbeat

Valve disease harms your heart valves' ability to keep blood flowing in and out of the heart correctly. Your valves work in each heartbeat, which flows like this:

1. Oxygenated blood from your lungs fills your heart's two upper chambers (atria)
2. As blood fills the atria, the mitral and tricuspid valves open and blood flows into the lower two chambers (ventricles)
3. When your ventricles contract, the mitral and tricuspid valves close, stopping blood from flowing back into the atria and allowing it to pump through the pulmonary and aortic valves
4. The pulmonary valve opens to allow blood to travel from the right ventricle into the pulmonary artery (this artery brings blood to your lungs for oxygen)
5. At the same time as the pulmonary valve opens, the aortic valve opens to allow blood to flow from the left ventricle into the aorta, which brings oxygen-rich blood to the body
6. As the cycle finishes, the ventricles relax, and the pulmonary and aortic valves shut tightly (these valves prevent blood from flowing back into the ventricles)





# Understanding Heart Valve Disease

Heart valve disease happens when one or more of your valves aren't working properly, and it can be present at birth or develop over time. In this disease, blood can't flow forward because of a blocked valve, or blood leaks backward into your heart's chambers because of a leaking or defective valve. Valve disease can cause your heart to work harder, making it more difficult to pump blood to your body.

Some of the most common heart valve disorders include:

- **Valvular insufficiency:** valves are leaky and don't close completely, causing blood to flow backward (in the wrong direction)
- **Valvular stenosis:** stiffening of the valve tissue, which narrows the valve opening



# Protecting Yourself From Heart Valve Disease

With heart valve disease, you can control some risk factors and others you can't. Discuss these factors with your doctor to determine the best prevention or treatment plan for you.

## Controllable Risks

### Cholesterol

Total cholesterol levels below 200 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL) are considered ideal.

### Excess Body Weight

If you're overweight, you're more likely to develop heart disease, even if you don't have other risk factors.

### High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is typically 140/90 mm Hg or higher, or if a physician has told you it's too high.

### Physical Inactivity

Exercise is important for a healthier heart, and can also help control cholesterol levels, diabetes and obesity.

### Tobacco Use

Smoking harms nearly every organ of your body and severely damages your heart and lungs.

## Uncontrollable Risks

### Age

Heart valve disease risk among both men and women increases significantly after age 65.

### Ethnicity

If you are African, Asian, Mexican, Native Hawaiian or Native American, you may face a high risk of heart valve disease.

### Family History

If you or someone in your family has heart disease or has a history of a heart attack, you might be at high risk for heart valve disease.

# Warning Signs of Heart Valve Disease

Because heart valve disease can be life-threatening, know the warning signs so that you can get to a doctor quickly for an evaluation and treatment, if necessary.

If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, call 911 immediately.

## Chest Pain

Feeling discomfort or pain as a tight ache, pressure, fullness or squeezing in your chest.

## Dizziness

Feeling dizzy or lightheaded.

## Fatigue

Feeling extreme tiredness, weakness or fainting.

## Palpitations

Having a racing heartbeat, or odd, flip-flop sensations.

## Rapid Weight Gain

Gaining up to several pounds in one day.

## Shortness Of Breath

Having a hard time breathing normally or deeply, with or without chest pain.

## Swelling

Having larger-than-normal ankles, feet or abdomen.



# Diagnosing Heart Valve Disease

If you're noticing symptoms of heart valve disease, your primary care doctor can refer you to a cardiologist who'll be able to diagnose you.

To diagnose heart valve disease, your cardiologist may do several tests and procedures, including:

- A physical exam with a stethoscope
- Echocardiography, which shows how well your heart pumps
- Electrocardiogram (EKG) to detect an irregular heartbeat
- Cardiac catheterization to check for valve backflow
- Cardiac magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)
- Chest X-ray, which can help reveal valve defects
- Stress tests, which can reveal signs of valve disease during exercise





# Treating Heart Valve Disease

No medicines cure heart valve disease, currently. But lifestyle changes and medicines can treat symptoms successfully and delay problems for many years. Eventually, though, you may need surgery to repair or replace a faulty heart valve.

Depending on your unique needs, your surgical options and non-surgical treatment options could include:

- An open-heart valve replacement or repair procedure
- Aortic reconstruction
- Balloon valvuloplasty
- Controlling blood pressure and heart rate, reducing strain on the heart
- Minimally invasive procedures, like with MitraClip
- Percutaneous procedures, including transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR)







## Face Valve Disease With Confidence

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