

Heart Valve Disease Discussion Guide

While you might feel worried about a new or possible diagnosis of heart valve disease, it's important to remember that you aren't alone. In the United States, about 5 million people are diagnosed with heart valve disease each year. Although heart valve disease is serious, the majority of cases are treatable.

A healthy heart has four valves that keep blood moving throughout the organ and the rest of the body. When one or more of these valves are affected by heart valve disease, blood can flow at a reduced rate or in the wrong direction. This can create symptoms and impact your health.

There are a few different paths that may lead to a discussion with your health care professional about heart valve disease. Maybe you've been diagnosed with heart valve disease. Or perhaps you've decided to learn more after realizing you have certain risk factors for heart valve disease.

Risk Factors, Symptoms and Other Heart Valve Disease Concerns

Many different factors increase your risk of heart valve disease.

Your age (especially if you're 65 or older) is one factor. If you have other medical problems (especially if you have a congenital heart malformation or certain autoimmune diseases) or heart disease risk factors (such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking or obesity), you also may need to get checked for heart valve disease.

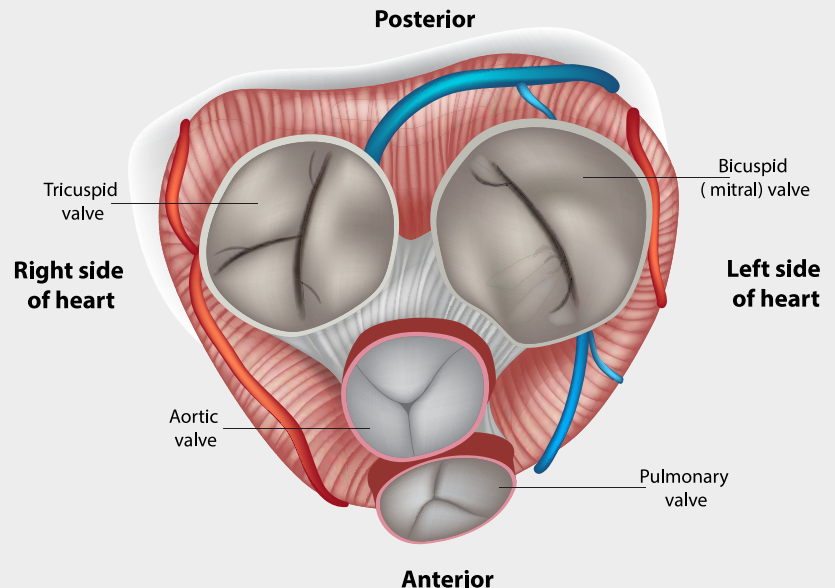
Or you could be having symptoms that might suggest a potential heart problem. **Many symptoms are associated with heart valve disease. They include shortness of breath, fever, dizziness, chest pain, swelling in feet and ankles, rapid weight gain, tiredness or exhaustion** (especially during activity) and unusual sensations (fluttering, pounding or racing) in your chest.

Each of these symptoms can be caused by different types of medical problems, so having them doesn't necessarily mean that you have heart valve disease. **However, if you have these symptoms, you should see a health care professional to determine the cause and treatment.**

Lastly, a health care professional might have noticed something (such as a heart murmur or abnormal finding on a diagnostic test) that signals a potential health problem and recommended further evaluation.

Some people with heart valve disease don't have symptoms. Therefore, even if you are having few or no symptoms, you still need to get checked.

Regardless of the reason that prompted the concern about heart valve disease, it's critical to have a timely discussion and evaluation with your health care professional. That's because **early diagnosis is key for improved outcomes.**





Preparing for a Heart Health Checkup

It can help to prepare before an appointment with your health care professional to discuss your heart health. Compiling notes and questions ahead of time can help you feel more confident for the discussion. It can also help ensure that you're equipped to share with your healthcare professional key information that can be used to decide on next steps.

If your health care professional's office has asked you to fill out paperwork, that's a good place to start. But you may also want to create your own notes to bring to the visit. On a digital device or in a physical notebook, note:

- Your family history (especially of heart disease, including heart valve disease)
- Your own medical history, especially for heart failure or heart attack, cancer treatment and previous infections (such as rheumatic fever or blood infections)
- Your current symptoms and the timeline of when they started (and worsened)
- Current list of medications and the conditions they're prescribed to manage or treat

A list of questions for your health care professional, such as:

What should I know about heart valve disease?

Do I have heart valve disease? If the answer isn't known, what tests or procedures are needed to determine if I have heart valve disease?

Is there anything that can be done to manage or treat my symptoms?
How can I prepare for any tests or procedures?

If I have heart valve disease, what stage is it and what are my treatment options?

What are the risks and benefits?
If I don't have heart valve disease, how can I reduce my risk of developing it in the future?

Following these steps can help you get the most benefit from your appointments with your health care professional. By talking with your health care professional(s) about heart valve disease concerns, you're staying on top of your health and giving them the best opportunity to help you.

