

Treat Me Right: Right Diagnosis, Right Time, Right Care

DIAGNOSING HEART VALVE DISEASE

Women with heart valve disease are often diagnosed later than men, sometimes at more serious stages. Their symptoms may be dismissed, and they may not be referred to specialists or imaging, which can delay diagnosis and treatment. In the past, women have also been underrepresented in heart research, which may affect how risk is recognized.

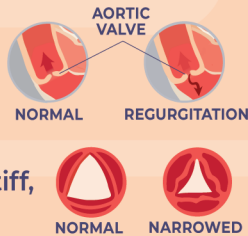


DIAGNOSING HEART VALVE DISEASE

ABOUT 5 MILLION Americans have heart valve disease, and millions more may not know they have it. Some people have no symptoms, and others may think fatigue and shortness of breath are just part of aging.

The two main issues are:

- **Regurgitation:** heart valves are leaky, allowing blood to flow backward in the heart
- **Stenosis:** heart valves are narrow or stiff, restricting blood flow to the heart



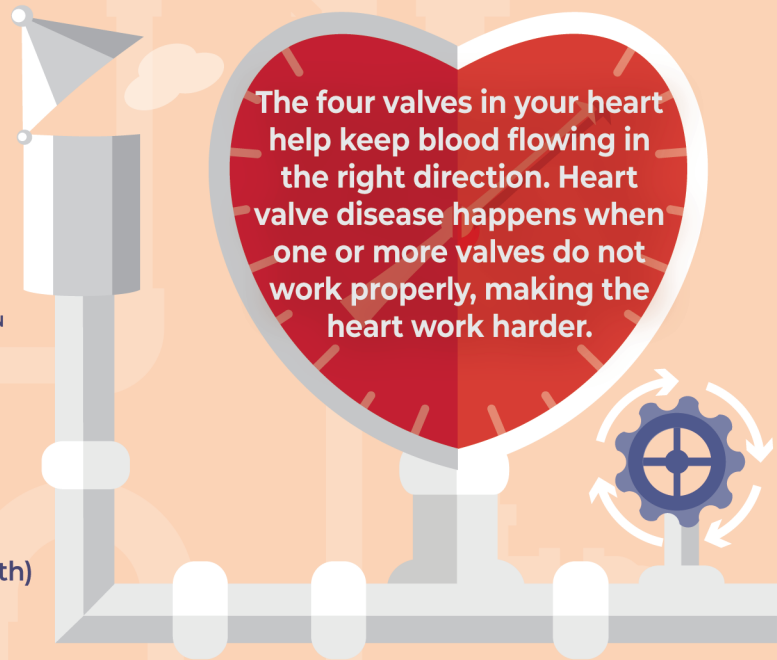
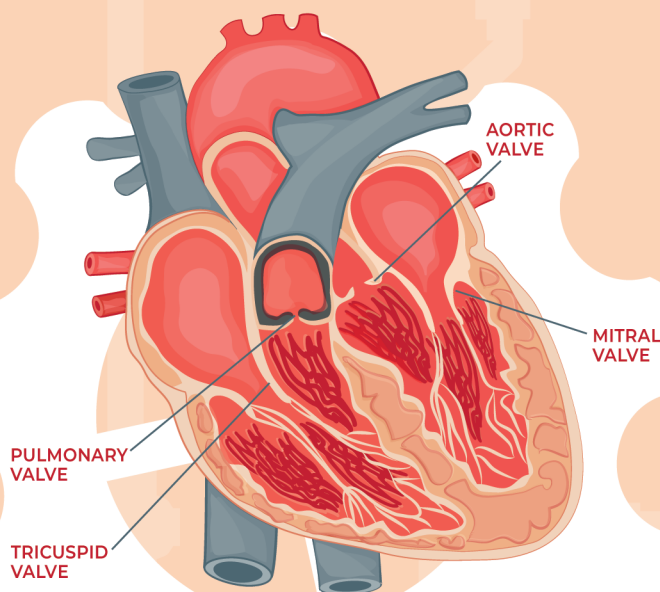
RISK FACTORS:

- Age (most frequent in people over age 65)
- History of congenital valve disease (developed before birth)
- History of rheumatic fever
- Infections like endocarditis (where bacteria enters the bloodstream and attacks the heart valves)
- Heart conditions such as coronary artery disease, heart attack, cardiomyopathy (heart muscle disease) and high blood pressure

COMMON SYMPTOMS:

- Unexplained fatigue and weakness
- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations (rapid or irregular heartbeat)
- Chest pain when physically active (sometimes people modify their activity to account for this—be aware of this risk!)
- Swelling in feet, ankles or stomach (edema)

Knowing the signs and symptoms can help you ask about testing. When valve disease is found early, treatment can begin sooner and may improve outcomes.



The four valves in your heart help keep blood flowing in the right direction. Heart valve disease happens when one or more valves do not work properly, making the heart work harder.

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OPTIONS:

Heart valve disease is diagnosed through a clinical evaluation and thorough medical history, including listening to your heart with a stethoscope to see if heart murmurs are detected. Additional tests usually include:

- **Electrocardiography (ECG):** Records the heart's electrical activity to look for rhythm problems
- **Echocardiography or "echo":** Uses ultrasound to create images of the heart, able to assess the structure and function of heart valves

These tests can confirm the diagnosis and show how severe the problem is. Treatment depends on severity. Some people take medication, and others are monitored over time. Valve disease is progressive and can worsen.

If the valve problem affects the heart's ability to pump blood, repair or replacement may be needed. This can be done through a minimally invasive procedure or open-heart surgery.

Like any heart condition, early diagnosis allows for timely treatment and better outcomes. Regular follow-up with your healthcare team is important. If you experience new or worsening symptoms, speak up and report them right away.



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THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR
WOMEN WITH HEART DISEASE



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WOMENHEART: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease is the nation's first and still only patient centered organization exclusively focused on serving millions of American women living with or at risk for heart disease — the leading cause of death in women. WomenHeart is solely devoted to advancing women's heart health through advocacy, community education, and the nation's only patient support network for women living with heart disease. WomenHeart is both a coalition and a community of thousands of members nationwide, including women heart patients and their families, physicians, and health advocates, all committed to helping women live longer, healthier lives. To learn more or to donate visit [womenheart.org](https://www.womenheart.org).

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