

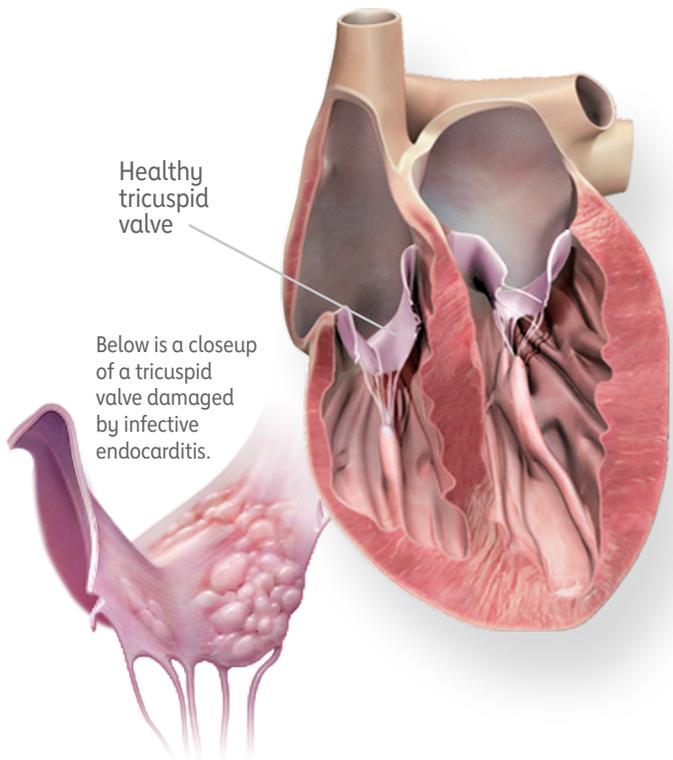


What Is Infective Endocarditis?

Infective endocarditis (IE) is an infection of either the heart’s inner lining or the heart valves. It is a serious — and sometimes fatal — illness.

Risk factors for developing IE include:

- Heart valve disease
- Weakened immune system
- Artificial heart valve, pacemaker or defibrillator
- Intravenous drug use
- Previous heart valve surgery
- Congenital heart disease
- Damage from rheumatic fever
- Poor dental health
- Prior history of infective endocarditis
- Age (older than 60)
- Gender, IE is more common in men



IE can affect men, women and children of all racial and ethnic groups. In the United States, there are more than 50,000 new cases each year.

What’s the role of bacteria?

Certain bacteria normally live on parts of your body. They live in or on the:

- Mouth and upper respiratory system
- Intestinal and urinary tracts
- Skin

Bacteria can enter the bloodstream. This is called bacteremia. These bacteria can settle on abnormal or damaged heart valves, implanted or artificial heart valves, or other damaged heart tissue. If this happens, they can damage or even destroy the heart valves.

The heart valves are important in guiding blood flow through the heart. They work like doors to keep the blood flowing in one direction. If they are damaged, the results can be very serious.

Bacteremia can occur after daily activities such as:

- Tooth brushing and flossing
- Use of water flossers
- Use of wooden toothpicks
- Chewing food

It can also result after certain surgical and dental procedures. However, not all bacteria cause endocarditis.

Who is at risk for IE?

People who have certain heart conditions are at an increased risk of developing infective endocarditis. People with the highest risk for poor outcomes from IE may be prescribed antibiotics before certain dental procedures to reduce their risk.

Heart conditions that put people at the highest risk for poor outcomes from IE include:

- Having an artificial heart valve
- Having a pacemaker or defibrillator
- Some kinds of congenital heart defects
- Having an abnormal heart valve after a heart transplant

Chronic hemodialysis — kidney dialysis three to five times a week — can also put some people at high risk for poor outcomes from IE.

(continued)



What Is Infective Endocarditis?

People who've had IE before are also at higher risk of getting it again. This is true even when they don't have heart disease.

How can infective endocarditis be prevented?

Not all cases can be prevented. That's because it's hard to know when an infection will occur.

For people whose heart conditions put them at the highest risk for poor outcomes from IE, the American Heart Association recommends antibiotics before certain dental procedures. These include procedures involving manipulation of gum tissue or the area around the roots of teeth or tears in the lining of the mouth. However, for most people, antibiotics are not needed.

The AHA has an infective endocarditis wallet card in English and Spanish. People who have been told to take antibiotics to prevent IE should carry it. You can get it from your health care professional or on the AHA website, heart.org. Show the card to your dentist or other health care professionals. It will help them take the precautions needed to protect your health.

You can reduce the risk of IE by maintaining good oral health through regular professional dental care and the use of dental products such as:

- Manual, powered and ultrasonic toothbrushes
- Dental floss
- Other plaque-removal devices



Practicing good oral hygiene can help reduce the risk of developing IE.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at HeartInsight.org.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

Am I at risk for infective endocarditis?

Should I take antibiotics before I see the dentist?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk of heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.