



Women's Cardiovascular Disease and Heart Valve Disease

Community Based Organizations Implementation Guide



**Empowering
women to be
their own health
advocate**



Within this guide you will find

- Overview of why this matters
- How your organization can support the initiative
- Resources about cardiovascular disease in women
- Messaging to reach the public about cardiovascular disease in women
- Resources about heart valve disease in women
- Messaging to reach the public about heart valve disease in women

Why this matters

- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in women.
- Only 44% of women are aware that cardiovascular disease is their leading cause of death.
- Women experience unique life stages that can increase their risk of developing cardiovascular diseases over the course of their lifetime.
- Among females 20 years of age and older between 2017 and 2020, nearly 45% had some form of cardiovascular disease.
- More than 5 million people in the U.S. are diagnosed with heart valve disease (HVD) each year.

Why this matters

- Many people with HVD may not experience symptoms until the disease reaches an advanced stage.
- Women are more likely than men to not be diagnosed and to experience worse health outcomes from heart valve disease. Awareness of this fact can help reduce disparities in health outcomes.
- Studies have shown that women and men experience heart valve disease differently. Women with conditions like mitral valve prolapse or rheumatic mitral valve disease often have more severe symptoms but are less likely to be referred for surgical interventions compared to men.
- Get to know your heart health by getting annual physical checkups, including having a health care professional listen to your heart with a stethoscope.

How your organization can help support:

Campaign implementation

Following are examples of how your organization can leverage the resources provided and elevate the voice and impact for women

Activate your social media channels

- Share provided content across your social media platforms and encourage reposts and retweets (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter).
- Follow the American Heart Association social media handles and engage (like, comment, repost/retweet campaign messages).

AHA: [Facebook](#) (@AmericanHeart), [X](#) (@American_Heart), [Instagram](#) (@American_Heart) + [LinkedIn](#) (American Heart Association)

Go Red for Women: [Facebook](#) (@goredforwomen), [X](#) (@goredforwomen), [Instagram](#) (@goredforwomen), [YouTube](#) (@goredforwomen)

- Sample messages and graphics are included in this toolkit.

Leverage E-newsletters and other digital/print communications tools

- Integrate campaign messaging and calls-to-action into your e-mail or print newsletters, magazines, etc.
- Link to the campaign resources on your organization's website.

Build a messaging calendar with additional touchpoints to drive the conversation

- February – American Heart Month
- February 22 – Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day
- November – Caregiver Month

Engage your conference/community event audiences

- Distribute resources at applicable events.
- Invite your audiences to download the resources.

Campaign Resources

At your fingertips, we've provided a repository of materials to educate the public. Organizations can use any or all resources to support the campaign.

Cardiovascular Disease in Women

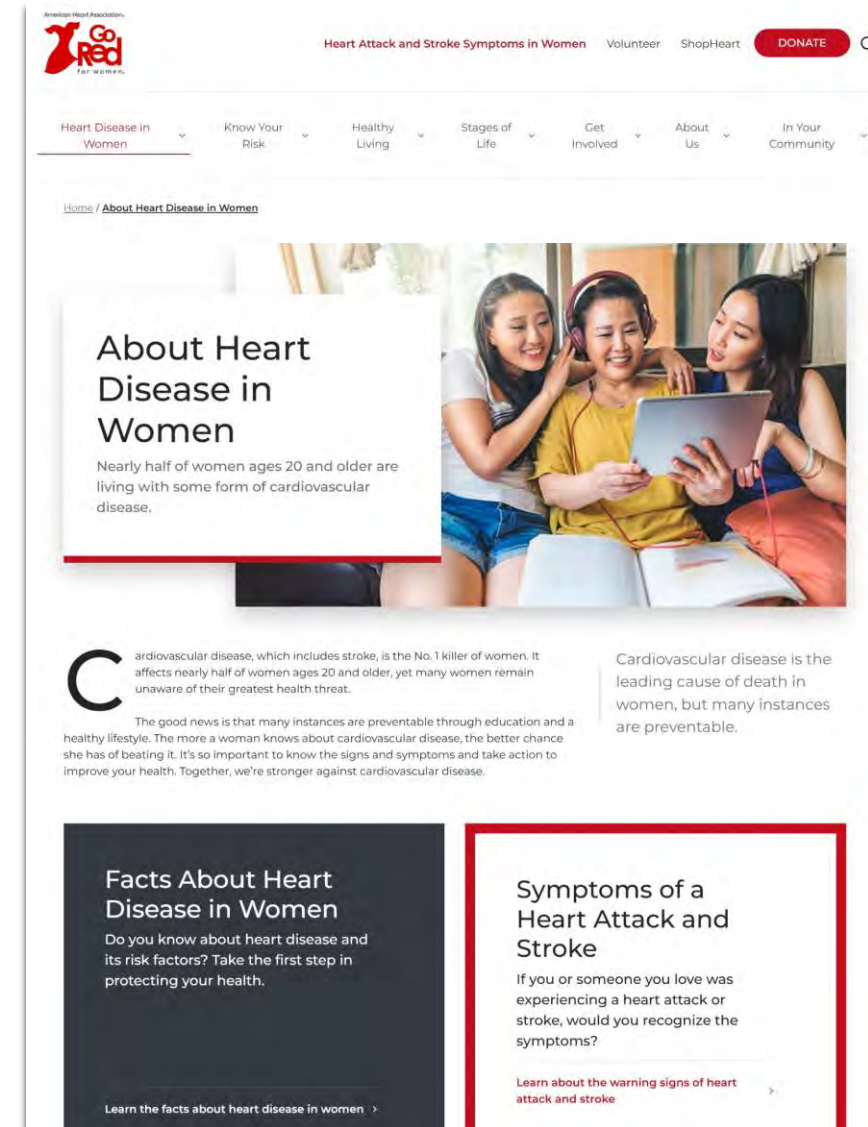
Resources, Messaging
and Creative



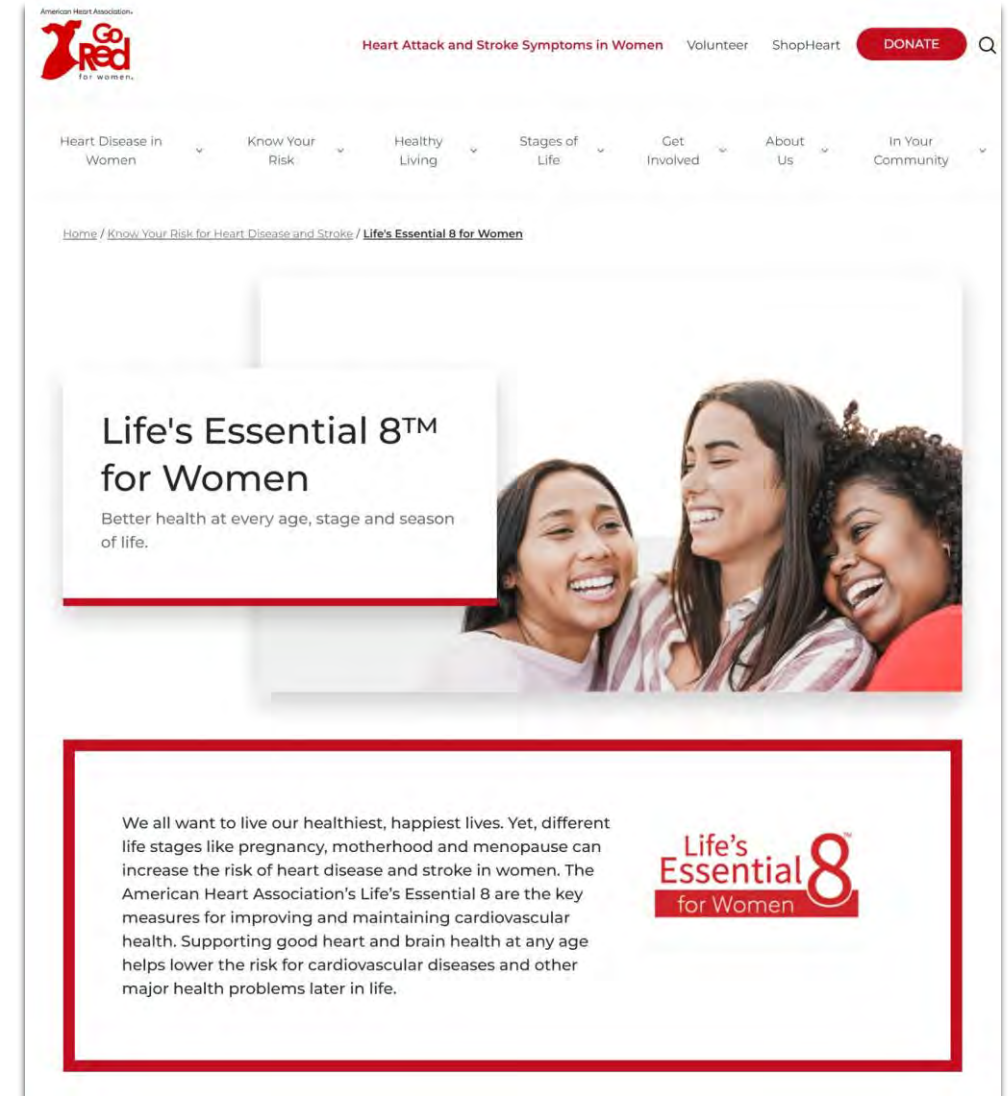
goredforwomen.org/heartdisease

This health education [website](#) provides a comprehensive overview of cardiovascular disease in women, including tools and resources.

Individuals and their loved ones can explore helpful content to understand their risk, recognize symptoms and warning signs, prepare thoughtful questions for their health care professional, and access downloadable resources designed to empower them throughout their health journey



This [education resource webpage](#) provides a comprehensive overview of The American Heart Association's Life's Essential 8 – the key measures for improving and maintaining cardiovascular health. Supporting good heart and brain health at any age helps lower the risk for cardiovascular diseases and other major health problems later in life.



Cardiovascular Disease Fact Sheets



Know the warning signs of heart attack and stroke
You could save your life

WARNING

Heart attack and stroke are life-or-death emergencies — every second counts. If you think you or someone else is having a heart attack or stroke, call 911 immediately. For a stroke, also note the time when the first symptoms appeared. A clot-busting drug received within 3 to 4.5 hours of the start of symptoms may improve your chances of getting better faster.

Heart Attack Warning Signs
Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. The warning signs are:

- 1. Chest discomfort: Heart attack symptoms include discomfort or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like a heavy weight on your chest, burning, fullness or pain.
- 2. Discomfort or pain in the upper body: Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- 3. Sudden and severe shortness of breath: It may occur with or without chest discomfort.
- 4. Other signs: Fainting, breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain.

Stroke Warning Signs

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding.
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

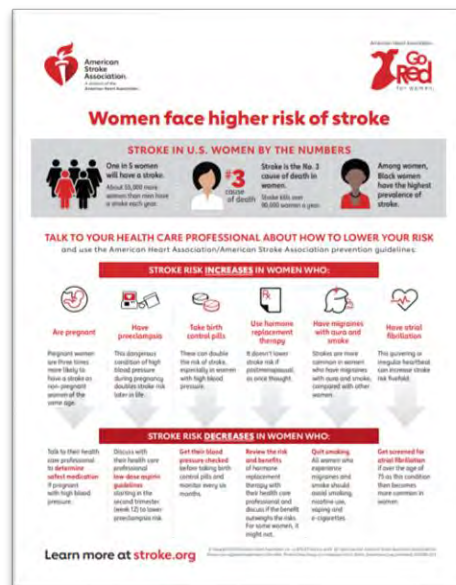
The acronym **F.A.S.T.** is an easy way to recognize and respond to the sudden warning signs of stroke. The letters stand for:

- 1. **Face drooping** — Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop or is it numb?
- 2. **Arm weakness** — Ask the person to raise both arms. Is one arm weaker or numb? Does one arm drift down?
- 3. **Speech difficulty** — Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence such as, "The sky is blue." Is the speech slurred or difficult to understand? Can the person follow simple instructions?
- 4. **Time to call 911** — If you observe any of these symptoms, or if one person shows any of these symptoms, call 911 immediately. Get them to the hospital as quickly as possible.

Visit AmericanHeartAssociation.org and National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute for more information on heart attack and stroke.

GoRedForWomen.org

Warning Signs of Heart Attack and Stroke



Women face higher risk of stroke

STROKE IN U.S. WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS

- One in 5 women will have a stroke.
- Stroke is the No. 2 cause of death in women.
- Among women, Black women have the highest prevalence of stroke.

TALK TO YOUR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL ABOUT HOW TO LOWER YOUR RISK
and use the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association prevention guidelines.

STROKE RISK INCREASES IN WOMEN WHO:

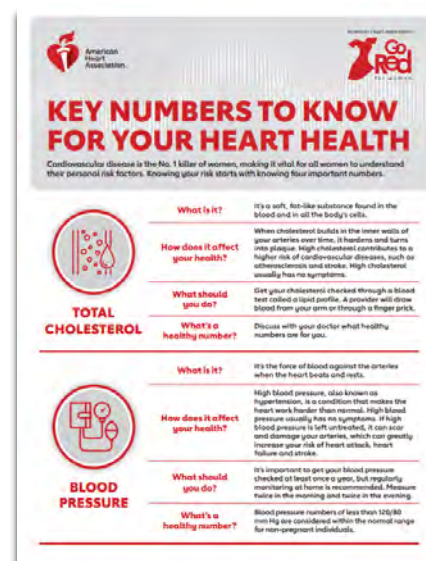
- Are pregnant**: Pregnant women are three times more likely to have a stroke in non-pregnant women of the same age.
- Have preeclampsia**: This dangerous condition of high blood pressure during pregnancy doubles stroke risk later in life.
- Take birth control pills**: These can double the risk of stroke, especially in women with high blood pressure.
- Use hormone replacement therapy**: It doesn't lower stroke risk if you're already on hormone therapy, as once thought.
- Have migraines with aura and stroke**: Strokes are more common in women who have migraines with aura and stroke compared with other women.
- Have atrial fibrillation**: This quivering or irregular heartbeat can increase stroke risk.

STROKE RISK DECREASES IN WOMEN WHO:

- Talk to their health care professional**: Discuss with their health care professional if pregnant with high blood pressure.
- Get their blood pressure checked**: Before taking birth control pills and monitor every six months.
- Review the risk and benefits of hormone replacement therapy**: Women who have migraines with aura should avoid taking hormone replacement therapy.
- Quit smoking**: Quitting smoking at any age reduces the risk of stroke.
- Get screened for atrial fibrillation**: If you're 65 or older, it's a good idea to get screened for atrial fibrillation.

Learn more at stroke.org

Women Face a Higher Risk of Stroke



KEY NUMBERS TO KNOW FOR YOUR HEART HEALTH
Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 killer of women, making it vital for all women to understand their personal risk factors. Knowing your risk starts with knowing four important numbers.

TOTAL CHOLESTEROL

What is it? It's a soft, fat-like substance found in the blood and in all the body's cells.

How does it affect your health? When cholesterol builds in the inner walls of your arteries over time, it hardens and turns into plaque. High cholesterol contributes to a higher risk of cardiovascular diseases, such as atherosclerosis and stroke. High cholesterol usually has no symptoms.

What should you do? Get your cholesterol checked through a blood test called a lipid profile. A provider will draw blood from your arm or through a finger prick.

What's a healthy number? Discuss with your doctor what healthy numbers are for you.

BLOOD PRESSURE

What is it? It's the force of blood against the arteries when the heart beats and rests.

How does it affect your health? High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is a condition that makes the heart work harder than normal. High blood pressure is left untreated, it can scar and damage your arteries, which can greatly increase your risk of heart attack, heart failure and stroke.

What should you do? It's important to get your blood pressure checked at least once a year, but regularly monitoring at home is recommended. Measure twice in the morning and twice in the evening.

What's a healthy number? Blood pressure numbers of less than 120/80 mm Hg are considered within the normal range for non-pregnant individuals.

Key Numbers to Know for Your Heart Health



Life's Essential 8 for Women

EMBRACE HEALTHY EATING
Nourish your Body and Mind

Eating healthy can be easy. Yes, you read that correctly. Maintaining a nutritious diet that supports your whole well-being isn't achieved through fast diets, bland meals, and counting calories. It's all about balance, finding tasty options you love, and making healthy choices.

- 1. It's okay to be extra. Enjoy - vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, plant-based proteins, lean animal proteins, skinless poultry, fish and seafood.
- 2. Less is more. Limit - sweetened drinks, alcohol, sodium, red and processed meats, refined carbohydrates like added sugars and processed grain foods, full-fat dairy products, highly processed foods, tropical oils like coconut and palm.
- 3. Break up with - trans fat and partially hydrogenated oils (found in some commercial baked goods and fried foods).

Learn to Love Labels
The most important labels to love shouldn't be found hanging in your closet but stored in your pantry instead. Learning how to read and understand nutrition labels can help you make healthier choices. When you have more than one choice, choose the products with lower amounts of sodium, saturated fat and added sugar.

SECRETS FOR SUCCESS
Remember these tips to help you stay on track with your healthy eating goals:

- 1. **KEEP THE CALORIES CONSCIOUS**: Understand serving sizes and keep portions reasonable. When measuring a healthy weight, aim to eat around as many calories as you work off through physical activity.
- 2. **BE QUEEN OF YOUR KITCHEN**: Take control over the nutritional content of your food by learning healthy preparation methods and cooking more at home.
- 3. **LOOK FOR THE HEART-CHECK**: The Heart-Check mark on food products helps you find foods that can be part of a healthy eating plan.
- 4. **GET INSPIRED**: The American Heart Association has hundreds of heart-healthy recipes to choose from.

GO RED TOGETHER
Help other women in your life embrace healthy eating, by choosing a heart-healthy recipe from goredforwomen.org/lifes8women.

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CVS Health

Life's Essential 8, Embrace Healthy Eating

Life's Essential 8, all downloadable resources

Uses: patient/provider conversations, take-home patient education, media/press events, waiting room print material, community events.

Social Media – Cardiovascular Disease



Heart attacks are more common in cold weather. Know the signs and call 911 when they're present. Learn More: goredforwomen.org/heartdisease



The No. 1 cause of death for women? Cardiovascular disease. Each year, it claims one in three women, more than all forms of cancer combined. We can change that stat through education and action. Learn More: goredforwomen.org/heartdisease



Every stage of a woman's life, from pregnancy to menopause, brings unique heart and brain health challenges. The American Heart Association's Life's Essential 8 offers simple steps to protect your heart at every age. Learn More: goredforwomen.org/heartdisease



At 52, Andrea survived a heart attack that nearly cost her life—and now she's on a mission to help women listen to their bodies and act fast when something feels off. Learn More: goredforwomen.org/heartdisease



Heart Disease and Women

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in women, but only 44% of women know this. Almost half of women over 20 have some form of heart disease.

The risk changes as women go through life stages like pregnancy and menopause. The good news? Most heart problems can be prevented with healthy habits and education. Take steps today to protect your heart. Every age and stage matters.

Talk with your health care professional to learn more.

Goredforwomen.org/heartdisease



Women, Heart Disease and High Blood Pressure

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in women, and high blood pressure is one of the biggest risk factors. High blood pressure can damage your heart and blood vessels over time, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke.

The good news? You can take control. Know your blood pressure numbers, eat a healthy diet, stay active, and talk to your doctor. Small steps make a big difference for your heart.

Talk with your health care professional to learn more.

Goredforwomen.org/heartdisease

Heart Valve Disease in Women

Resources, Messaging
and Creative

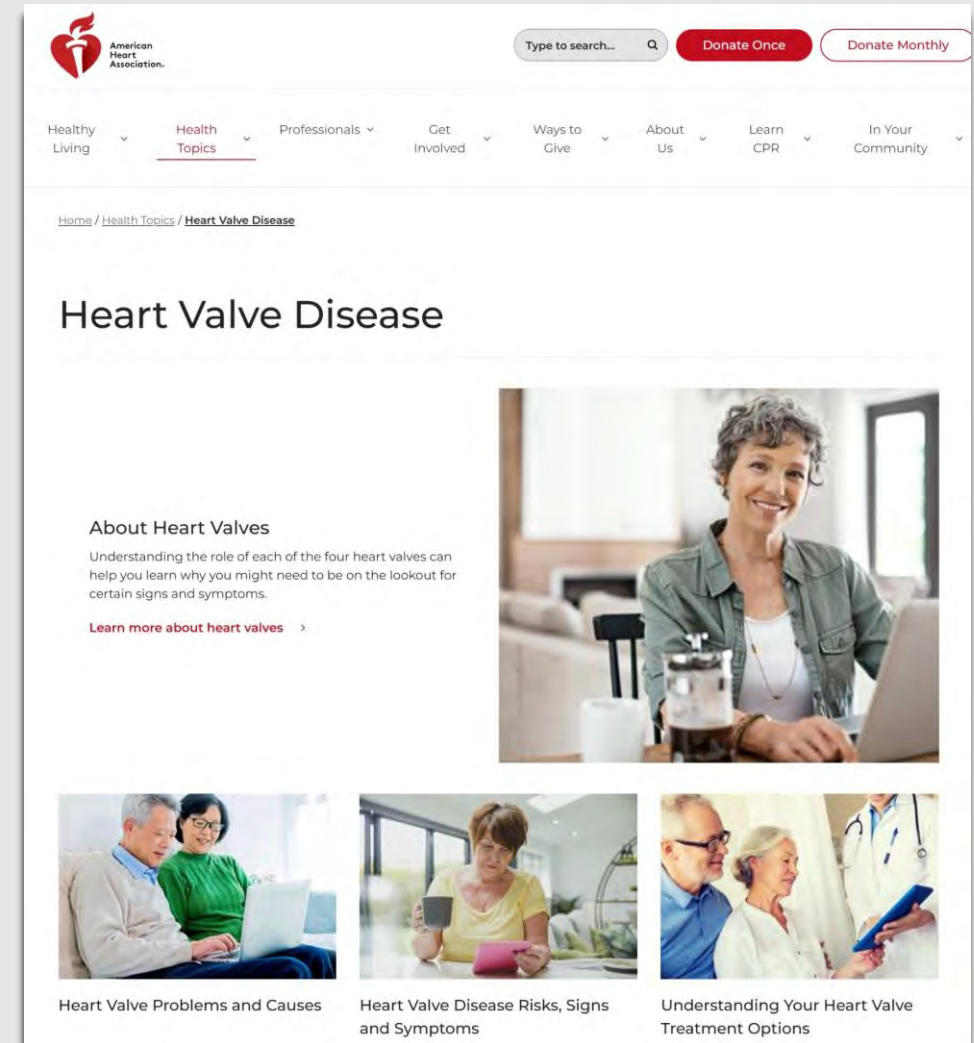


Heart.org/HeartValves

This patient/public health education [website](#) provides a comprehensive overview of heart valve disease, including tools and resources for people living with heart valve disease.

Patients and their loved ones can:

- Review content to help understand patient risk.
- Watch patient videos and stories of hope.
- Download a discussion guide that can help prepare patients to talk with their health care professionals.



This [patient/public health education resource webpage](#) provides a comprehensive overview of all our heart valve disease tools and resources for people at-risk or living with heart valve disease.

From experiencing symptoms to preparing for a valve replacement, wherever people are on their patient journey, they can find the information they need to take control of their health.



The screenshot shows the American Heart Association website's 'About Heart Valves' page. The header includes the AHA logo, a search bar, and donation buttons. The main navigation bar lists categories like Healthy Living, Health Topics, Professionals, Get Involved, Ways to Give, About Us, Learn CPR, and In Your Community. The breadcrumb trail reads: Home / Health Topics / Heart Valve Disease / About Heart Valves.

About Heart Valves

New to managing your heart valve condition?

We encourage you to take time to learn how your heart works and how each of the valves function. When you understand the specifics of your condition, you'll be better equipped to understand the treatment options.

[Watch an animation of heart valve anatomy.](#)



© American Heart Association

We have helpful media and tips from people who have walked the journey to wellness.

- Visit [heart valves and circulation](#) to get a better understanding of the basics of blood flow.
- Understanding the [role of each of the four heart valves](#) can help you learn why you might need to watch for certain [signs and symptoms](#).

Valve disease treatment plans can be complex, with many factors determining who might be a candidate for medical therapy or valve repair or replacement. We want to help you be a well-prepared participant in your [treatment decisions](#).



Understanding Heart Valve Disease

Heart valve disease is an umbrella term for conditions that affect the way one or more of the heart's four valves work properly.

Heart valves help blood move through the heart's four chambers, then out to the body.

When a valve doesn't work properly, it can cause blood to flow backward or not flow forward properly. This can lead to heart failure, stroke, or other complications. If you have heart valve disease, your doctor will help you understand your condition and the best way to manage it.

Heart Valve Disease

- About Heart Valves
- Heart Valves and Circulation
- Roles of Your Four Heart Valves
- Heart Valve Problems and Causes
- Risks, Signs and Symptoms
- Getting an Accurate Diagnosis
- Treatment Options
- Recovery and Healthy Living Goals
- Personal Stories
- Heart Valve Disease Resources

Related Articles

- [How symptoms or pressure affect blood flow](#)
- [Atherosclerosis in the heart](#)
- [Shortness of breath](#)
- [Rapid fluttering heartbeat](#)
- [Fainting](#)
- [Difficulty sleeping or waking up](#)
- [Swollen ankles or feet](#)
- [Difficulty walking short distances](#)

Symptoms of Heart Valve Disease

Heart Valve Disease Fact Sheets

What is Heart Valve Disease?

Heart valve disease occurs when one of the heart's four valves stops functioning properly.

MORE THAN 5 MILLION Americans have heart valve disease. It's most common in older adults.

Valves keep blood pumping through the heart. When a valve opens, blood empties from one of the heart's four chambers. When it closes, it prevents blood from leaking backward.

Some people have no symptoms. But poorly functioning heart valves can cause:

- Chest pain
- Palpitations
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Lightheadedness
- Fainting
- Swollen ankles, feet or abdomen

As people age, heart valves may malfunction if:

- Calcium deposits build up, which stiffens valves.
- Valve wear and tear causes leaks.

*Heart valve disease can also occur earlier in life. Some babies are born with malfunctioning heart valves.



Fact Sheet provides an overview of what heart valve disease is

Understanding Heart Valve Disease

Heart valves help blood move through the heart's four chambers, then out to the body.

Valve damage can stop a heart valve from working effectively. If a valve doesn't close properly, blood can leak backward, decreasing the amount of oxygen-rich blood that can circulate throughout the body. If a valve doesn't open fully, the heart muscle must work harder to pump blood, which can cause chest pain, fatigue or other symptoms. Untreated heart valve disease may lead to complications, including heart failure.

Heart valve disease is an umbrella term for conditions that arise when any of the heart's four valves stop working properly.

What are the different valves in the heart?

The heart has four chambers, separated by four valves. Heart valves play a key role in moving blood forward through the heart.

Pulmonary valve: Prevents the right ventricle from pumping blood back into the right atrium. If the valve doesn't close properly, blood can leak backward, causing the right ventricle to pump harder than it should. This can lead to right-sided heart failure.

Aortic valve: Prevents the left ventricle from pumping blood back into the left atrium. If the valve doesn't close properly, blood can leak backward, causing the left ventricle to pump harder than it should. This can lead to left-sided heart failure.

Mitral valve: Prevents the left atrium from pumping blood back into the left ventricle. If the valve doesn't close properly, blood can leak backward, causing the left atrium to pump harder than it should. This can lead to left-sided heart failure.

Tricuspid valve: Prevents the right atrium from pumping blood back into the right ventricle. If the valve doesn't close properly, blood can leak backward, causing the right atrium to pump harder than it should. This can lead to right-sided heart failure.

How is heart valve disease diagnosed?

Health care professionals may discover signs of heart valve disease during a physical exam. When they listen to the heart with a stethoscope, they may hear an abnormal heart sound (murmur), like whooshing or clicking.

When health care professionals suspect heart valve disease, they often tests to diagnose the condition, including:

- Echocardiogram
- Imaging tests, like X-ray or CT scan
- An exercise test
- Electrocardiogram



Understanding Heart Valve Disease Progression, management and treatment options

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.

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 thorough discussion and evaluation with your health care professional. That's because early diagnosis is key for improved outcomes.

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.



Heart Valve Disease Discussion Guide Questions for your health care professional

After Heart Valve Disease Diagnosis Discussion Guide

If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with heart valve disease, you might be experiencing a range of emotions. You may have many questions and feel overwhelmed, confused or uncertain about where to find answers.

You may feel worried, scared or perplexed about how heart valve disease might affect your life and your future, and what options are available for managing or treating your condition.

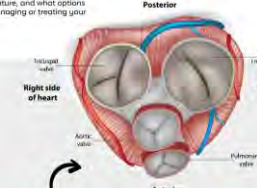
You are not alone. Each year, about 5 million people are diagnosed with heart valve disease in the United States. While heart valve disease is a serious health condition, it's usually treatable, especially if it's caught early.

Understanding your heart valve disease is an important first step. Here are the basics:

Your heart has four valves, which move blood throughout the heart and the rest of the body. In heart valve disease, one or more of these valves don't work correctly. As a result, blood can flow at a reduced rate or in the wrong direction.

Heart valve disease sometimes causes symptoms such as shortness of breath, fever, dizziness, chest pain, swelling in feet and ankles, and rapid weight gain. It can also cause tiredness or exhaustion (especially during activity), and unusual sensations (fluttering, pounding or racing) in your chest.

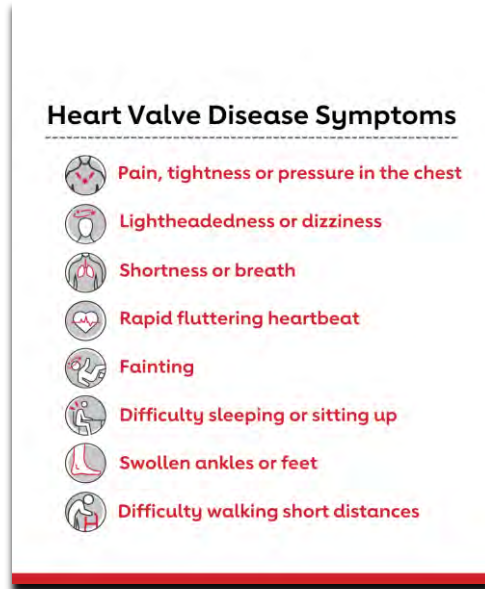
Regardless of whether you have many, few or no symptoms, it's still critical that you receive proper management.



After Heart Valve Disease Diagnosis Discussion Guide Understanding the stages of heart valve disease

Heart Valve Disease, all downloadable resources

Uses: patient/health care professional conversations, take-home patient education, media/press events, waiting room print material, community events



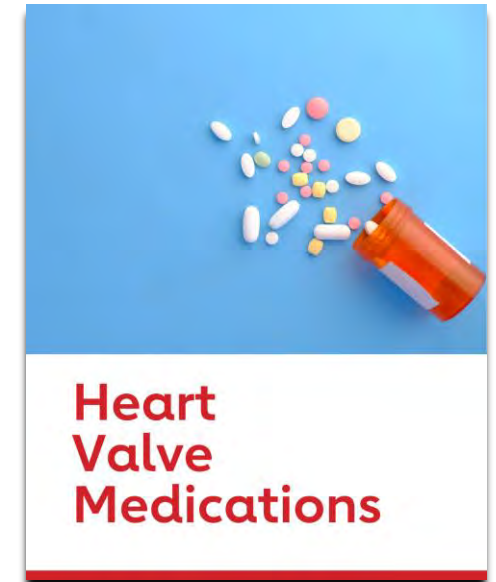
Tracking heart valve disease symptoms can help you and your health care team know if your condition is getting better or worse. Note if these symptoms occur never, occasionally, often or always and share with your doctor at your next appointment. Learn More: heart.org/heartvalves



Claire was five months pregnant and having trouble breathing, she got a new heart valve and later had a healthy baby boy. Learn More: heart.org/heartvalves



Marisa was born with a bicuspid aortic valve and lived an active life, but pregnancy with her second child led to a heart attack and major surgery. Today, she's thriving with a fully functioning heart for the first time ever. Learn More: heart.org/heartvalves



Heart Valve Medications

Medication won't stop a defective heart valve from leaking. And it won't open a valve that's too constricted. But it can still be an important part of keeping your heart working as effectively as possible. Talk to your health care team and always take them as prescribed. Learn More: heart.org/heartvalves



It's not aging, it's heart valve disease

Heart valve disease is a serious condition that becomes more common with age. General physical decline could signal it, so know the symptoms:

- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Swelling in feet or ankles
- Dizziness
- Rapid weight gain
- Feeling extra tired during activity
- Fluttering or racing heartbeat

Talk with your health care professional to learn more.

heart.org/heartvalves



Time for a heart-to-heart

Heart valve disease is a serious condition that can mimic common signs of aging. It usually strikes people over 65. A standard echocardiogram is painless and can reveal whether you have heart valve disease.

Talk with your health care professional to learn more. heart.org/heartvalves



THANK YOU

Thank you for joining the movement to help reduce cardiovascular death in women.

Made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.