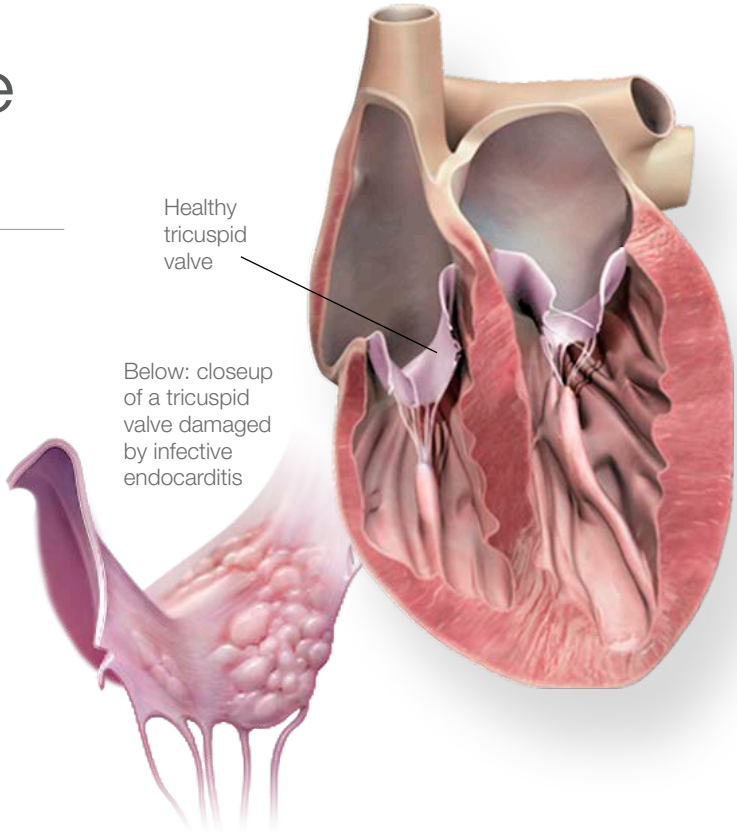
What Is Infective Endocarditis?

Infective (bacterial) endocarditis (IE) is an infection of either the heart's inner lining (endocardium) or the heart valves. Infective endocarditis is a serious — and sometimes fatal — illness. Two things increase risk for it to occur: pathogens such as bacteria or fungi in the blood and certain high-risk heart conditions.

Men, women and children of all racial and ethnic groups can get it. In the United States, there are up to 34,000 hospital discharges related to IE 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 get in the bloodstream. This is called bacteremia. These bacteria can settle on abnormal, damaged, or prosthetic 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 become damaged, the results can be very serious.

A brief bacteremia can occur after many routine daily activities such as:

- tooth brushing and flossing.
- use of wooden toothpicks.
- use of water picks.
- chewing food.

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

What's the heart's role?

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

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

- artificial (prosthetic) heart valves or heart valves repaired with artificial material
- a history of infective endocarditis
- some kinds of congenital heart defects
- abnormality of the heart valves after a heart transplant

People who've had IE before are at higher risk of getting

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it again. This is true even when they don't have heart disease.

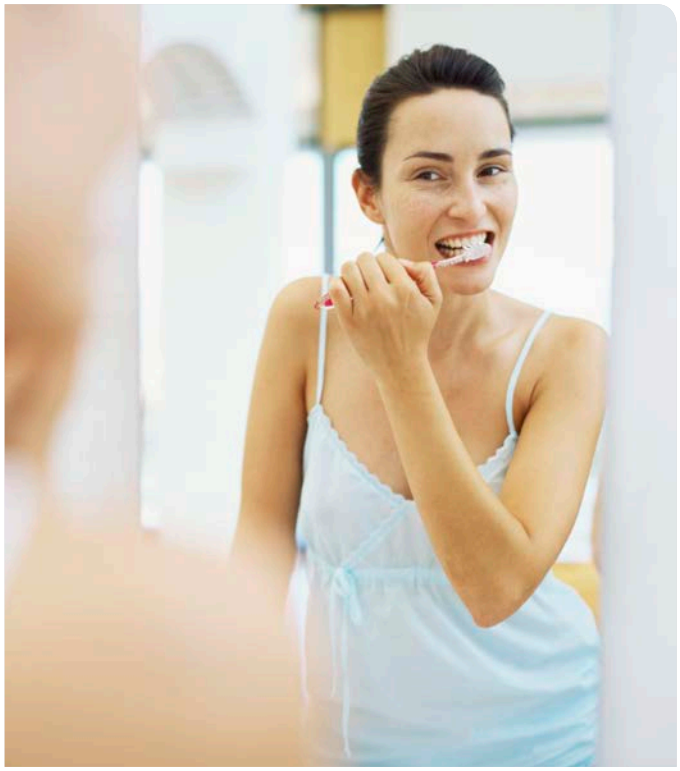
How can infective endocarditis be prevented?

Not all cases can be prevented. That's because we don't always know when an infection will occur.

For patients whose heart conditions put them at the highest risk for adverse events from IE, the American Heart Association (AHA) recommends antibiotics before certain dental procedures. These include procedures that involve manipulation of gingival tissue or the periapical region of teeth, or perforation of the oral mucosa. However, for most patients, antibiotics are not needed.

The AHA has an endocarditis wallet card in English and Spanish. People who have been told that they need to take antibiotics should carry it. You can get it from your doctor or on our Web site, **heart.org**. Show the card to your dentist or physician. It will help them take the precautions needed to protect your health.

Keeping your mouth clean and healthy and maintaining regular dental care may reduce the chance of bacteremia from routine daily activities.



Patients whose heart conditions put them at risk for IE may reduce the risk by practicing good dental hygiene. In some cases, they may need to take antibiotics prior to dental procedures.

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 to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine 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 your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

What conditions do I have that put me at risk for 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, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.

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