



What Is Heart Valve Surgery?

Heart valve surgery is done to replace or repair heart valves that aren't working correctly. Most valve replacements involve the aortic and mitral valves. The aortic valve separates the left ventricle (your heart's main pumping chamber) and the aorta (the major artery that carries blood to your body from the heart). The mitral valve separates the left atrium from the left ventricle.

The four valves in your heart make sure that blood flows through your heart in the right direction.

Aortic valve Pulmonary valve
Tricuspid valve Mitral valve

If a valve becomes diseased or damaged, it may need to be replaced with an artificial one like the mechanical valve shown here.



What do heart valves do?

The four valves in your heart are made of thin (but strong) flaps of tissue that open and close as your heart pumps. They make sure that blood flows through your heart in the right direction. Your valves work hard as they stretch back and forth with every heartbeat.

What are the types of valve problems?

Heart valve problems make the heart work too hard. This can lead to heart failure. In some cases, valves:

- Don't open enough (stenosis).
- Don't let enough blood flow through (also called stenosis).
- Don't close properly and let blood leak where it shouldn't. This is called incompetence, insufficiency or regurgitation.
- Prolapse — mitral valve flaps don't close properly (more common in women). As pressure builds inside

the left ventricle, it pushes the mitral valve flap back into the left atrium, which may cause a small leak.

What causes valve problems?

- A small birth defect that's not repaired may get worse later in life and cause problems.
- Aging can make valves weaken or harden.
- Certain diseases can scar or destroy a valve.

What can be done?

- Yearly check-ups with your doctor, living a healthy lifestyle, or medication may be all that's needed.
- In some cases, an operation may be needed to repair a damaged valve.
- Sometimes the valve must be taken out and replaced with a new, artificial one. Ask your doctor about the different kinds used.

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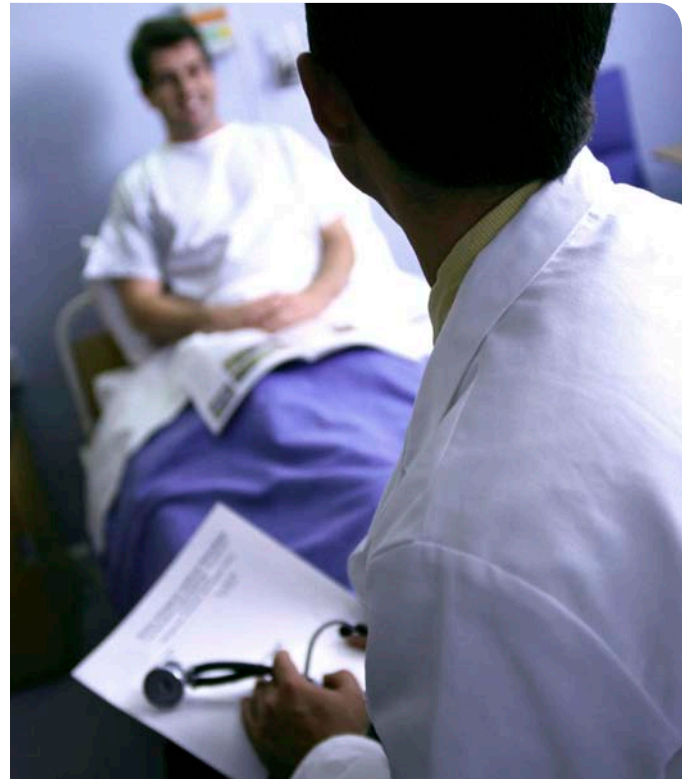
What is valve surgery like?

With some heart valve problems, the best treatment is surgery. Your doctor will tell you more, but here are some things you can expect:

- You'll be asleep during the operation. It can take 3 to 5 hours.
- After surgery, you'll go to an intensive care unit (ICU).
- Your family can visit you briefly in the ICU.

What about afterwards?

- After you leave the ICU, you'll move to a hospital room.
- You'll be sore and stiff from the incision.
- To clear the fluids in your lungs, you must breathe deeply and cough hard.
- You'll be given medicine.
- In a day or two, you'll be able to sit up and start walking around.
- You can eat normally, though salt may be restricted.
- You'll feel a little better and stronger each day.



After you leave the ICU, you'll be moved to a hospital room where you'll recover for a few days.

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:

Will my artificial valve cause problems?

When can I go back to work?

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.