

Heart Valve Voice

Getting Ready for Your Doctor's Visit

This downloadable resource is designed to help you prepare for your doctor's visit and ensure you get the most efficient and helpful consultation possible. This document provides you with information on heart valve disease and includes type of questions your doctor may ask you. It also provides you with useful hints and tips on how to prepare for the consultation and gives you suggestions as to some important questions you should ask your doctor during the visit.

HEART VALVE DISEASE:

The heart has four chambers and is responsible for pumping blood around the body. There are a series of valves in the heart which, when working properly, ensure that blood flows in the right direction. Diseased or defective heart valves (those that have become narrowed "*stenosed*" or leaky "*regurgitation*", or both) may not open or close properly and can interfere with the flow of blood.

The most common cause of heart valve disease in the U.S. is age-related degeneration of the heart valves. On occasion, heart valve disease can be caused by infection (endocarditis), or be related to heart defects present at birth. There are a number of other causes also.

If you are experiencing shortness of breath, a cough, chest tightness, chest pain, fatigue, light-headedness or dizziness; it is important that you see your doctor, even if you think it may just be a "normal" part of aging. These symptoms can result from a variety of causes but, may be an indication of heart valve disease which can be treated.

WHAT YOUR DOCTOR MAY ASK YOU?

When you see your doctor and discuss any concerns you may have about chest problems that could be an indication of heart valve disease, they are likely to ask questions including:

YOUR MEDICAL HISTORY

- **Do you have any other medical illnesses?**
- **Are you taking any medications?**
- **Do you or anyone in your family suffer from any heart conditions such as a heart murmur?**

YOUR SYMPTOMS

- **Do you feel older than your age?** *If so*, sometimes or often?
- **Have you experienced chest pain?** *If so*, how frequently does it occur, how long does it last and how would you describe the type of pain?
- **Have you felt dizzy/faint?** *If so*, how frequently and in what situations
- **Have you experienced rapid heart beats or racing?** *If so*, how often and in what circumstances do they occur?
- **Are you experiencing an irregular heartbeat?** *If so*, how did you notice and how often does it occur?
- **Are you finding it difficult to exercise and move around as easily as you use to?** *If so*, is this a constant issue or do you find it is only in certain situations i.e when you are at home, walking up stairs, going shopping or while exercising?
- **Have you been feeling short of breath?** *If so*, how often and does it affect your everyday activities?
- **Are you feeling tired?** *If so*, how often? Do you constantly feel tired and fatigued? What about after a good night's sleep?
- **Have you changed your exercise routine in the past year?** *If so*, how?

It is important to answer the questions as honestly and with as much detail as possible. To help you do this, keep a diary of your symptoms for a few weeks so you are clear on what, when, where and how symptoms present. To help you keep track of your symptoms, please download our symptoms diary by [clicking here](#).



WHAT SHOULD YOU ASK YOUR DOCTOR?

The symptoms of heart valve disease may seem like something else. To detect heart valve disease, the doctor needs to use a stethoscope to listen for the characteristic heart “murmur” or “click-murmur” which is often the first indication of a heart valve disorder. Other tests are needed to diagnose heart valve disease and determine how serious the problem is.

Should your doctor suspect heart valve disease, you should be confident in asking questions to get all the information and guidance you need.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK:

- Why am I experiencing these symptoms?
- Is this a long term condition?
- Is my condition curable?
- Will I have to have more tests / see a specialist?
- What will those tests involve?
- If I do have heart valve disease, are there lifestyle changes that I can make to manage the condition or will I need treatment?
- What are the treatments options for heart valve disease?
- Which healthcare professionals will be treating me if I have heart valve disease?
- How effective is the treatment of heart valve disease?
- How much will my life change?

**Heart Valve Voice US is providing suggested questions and symptoms of heart valve disease to help patients speak to their doctor. This resource is by no way conclusive and should not be used to self-diagnose heart valve disease or other conditions.*