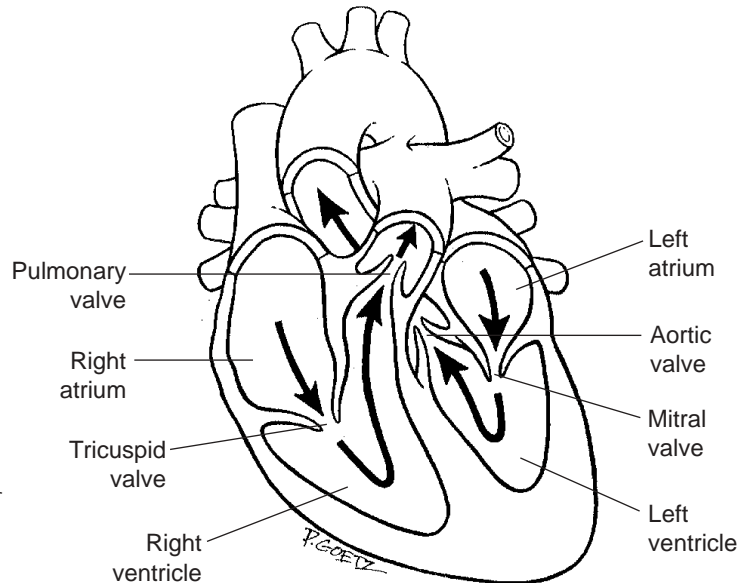


# What is Heart Valve Surgery?

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## 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 are there to make sure that blood flows through your heart the right way. Your valves work hard as they stretch back and forth with every heartbeat.



Your heart has four rooms or chambers. Each chamber has a valve that acts like a door. The four valves open and close as they keep blood flowing through your heart the right way.

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## What are the types of valve problems?

- Don't open enough; called 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.
  - Make the heart work too hard and lead to heart failure.
  - 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.
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## 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.
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## What can be done?

- Yearly checkups with your doctor, medicine and living a healthy lifestyle 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 facts:

- 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 ICU.

## What about afterwards?

- After you leave 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.

## How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit [americanheart.org](http://americanheart.org) to learn more about heart disease.
3. For more information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at [StrokeAssociation.org](http://StrokeAssociation.org).

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

## What are the Warning Signs of Heart Attack and Stroke?

### Warning Signs of Heart Attack:

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- Chest discomfort
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort
- Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness

### Warning Signs of Stroke:

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, 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

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor or nurse?

- Take a few minutes to write your own 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?

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