What You Need To Know About Heart Valve Disease

(NAPS)—More than 8 million American adults have a condition known as heart valve disease (HVD). While it can be managed, too many people who have HVD don’t know it.

To help that situation, the American Heart Association, with support from Edwards Lifesciences Foundation, answers seven frequently asked questions:

1. **What is HVD?** In HVD, heart valves don’t work as they should. A heart valve should open one way and stay tight when closed. Sometimes, either due to congenital heart defects, side effects of cancer treatment, or secondary heart disease, the valve allows leaks, putting a strain on the heart and prohibiting proper circulation of blood.

2. **Who’s at risk?** HVD can happen to anyone at any age, but the risk increases with age and in those with congenital heart valve defects or who have had a heart attack, rheumatic fever, hypercholesterolemia, or an infection in the lining of the heart walls or valves. These individuals should speak frequently with their health care providers about HVD.

Currently, HVD prevalence is greater in older Caucasians, though African Americans and Hispanics tend to have lower ideal heart health levels, which can lead to HVD.

3. **Is HVD preventable?** No, but it can be managed through a healthy lifestyle including proper nutrition, exercise, not smoking, weight management, and medication. Most people who get treatment experience improved symptoms and can continue to live longer, healthy lives.

4. **What are the signs and symptoms?**
   - Shortness of breath
   - Feeling easily fatigued
   - Swollen ankles or feet
   - Heart palpitations (rapid rhythms or skips)
   - Chest tightness or pressure
   - Symptoms can be subtle and are often attributed to aging or other diseases. If you experience any of these, see your doctor.

5. **What treatments are available?** The heart valve can be repaired, or replaced with an artificial one.

6. **Who can help?** There’s a group of volunteer ambassadors comprised of heart valve disease survivors and caregivers who represent the face of heart valve disease in America. They work to raise awareness about heart valve disease and share available resources for patients and families. You can connect with them at sharefromheartheart.org.

7. **Where can one learn more?** You can get further information from the American Heart Association at sharefromheart.org.