

Our Health

Understanding Your Risk Of Heart Valve Disease

(NAPSM)—More than 8 million American adults have a condition known as heart valve disease (HVD).

What It Is

The condition causes heart valves, which should open one way and seal tight when closed, to develop leaks. This can put a strain on the heart and interfere with proper circulation of blood.

How It Happens

It can be due to congenital heart defects, calcification due to aging, side effects of cancer treatment, or secondary heart disease.

Who Gets HVD

While currently the prevalence of the disease appears to be greater in older Caucasians, HVD may be seriously undiagnosed or underdiagnosed in African-American and Hispanic communities, particularly among younger people. In addition, African Americans and Hispanics are especially susceptible to HVD because of a tendency toward an increased rate of high blood pressure and heart problems.

What To Watch For

Signs you might have HVD can include:

- Shortness of breath
- Feeling easily fatigued
- Swollen ankles or feet
- Heart palpitations (rapid rhythms or skips)
- Chest tightness or pressure.

These symptoms can be subtle and are often attributed to aging or other diseases. If you experience any of them, see your doctor.

What To Do

Fortunately, if you are diagnosed with HVD, there are steps you can take to improve your chances of a longer, healthier life. HVD can be managed



When caught early, heart valve disease can be treated to help you have a longer, healthier life.

through proper nutrition, exercise, not smoking, weight management and in some cases, medication. In addition, the heart valve can be repaired, or replaced with an artificial one. Heart valve disease worsens over time, although the progress can be so slow that it isn't detected until the condition becomes severe and surgery may be necessary.

A Problem

According to one study, not only were African-American patients with aortic heart valve disease 54 percent less likely to be referred to a cardiothoracic surgeon than were white patients, when valve surgery was recommended, one in three refused the treatment.

An Answer

To counter such statistics, the American Heart Association, with support from Edwards Lifesciences Foundation, aims to empower at-risk individuals to take action for their own health and to join the community of HVD patients and caregivers who promote awareness and share resources.

Learn More

You can get further information at sharefromheart.heart.org.