

Repair or Replace: Options for Aortic Valve Disease

Your heart is perfectly designed to do its job of pumping blood through your body.

The heart has four muscular chambers that squeeze with every heartbeat to push blood through your blood vessels.

It also has four valves that, when working properly, make sure blood can only flow in the right direction.

Two valves are located between the upper and lower chambers of your heart, and two are located between your heart and the major arteries connected to your heart.

If any of these valves don't work right, you will be diagnosed with heart valve disease.

The aortic valve is one of your four heart valves. This valve is located between your heart's main pumping chamber, called the left ventricle, and your body's largest artery, called the aorta.

With every powerful heartbeat, a healthy aortic valve opens so blood can gush into the aorta. From there, it is carried throughout your whole body.

There are a few conditions that can affect how your aortic valve functions. The most common ones include:

Aortic regurgitation. This occurs when the valve doesn't close all the way, so some blood can flow backward.

Symptoms can include heart palpitations, chest pain, fatigue, and shortness of breath.

Aortic stenosis. This condition occurs when the valve opening is too narrow, so not enough blood can flow through with every heartbeat.

Symptoms can include chest pain, breathlessness, fainting, and trouble doing normal activities.

If aortic regurgitation or aortic stenosis are left untreated they both can lead to heart failure.

Aortic valve disease can be caused by several issues, including scarring of the valve tissue, age-related stiffening of the valve, birth defects, high blood pressure, bacterial infection, or injury.

If you have been diagnosed with aortic valve disease, your doctor may recommend one of the following:

Monitoring your health on a regular basis. If you don't have any symptoms, this may be the approach recommended by your healthcare provider.

Valve repair. During a valve repair, your healthcare provider will perform a procedure restoring function to your aortic valve.

This may include widening the valve with a special type of balloon that is inflated inside the valve or another procedure as recommended by your provider.

And finally, valve replacement.

Repair or Replace: Options for Aortic Valve Disease

This procedure can either be done with traditional open-heart surgery or by using a newer, minimally invasive approach that relies on smaller incisions and long, thin tubes called catheters.

During a valve replacement, your doctor will replace the damaged valve with a mechanical valve.

The type of surgery and valve will depend on your unique situation.

Left untreated, aortic valve disease can cause serious health problems.

Fortunately, research has shown that repairing or replacing a damaged aortic valve can reduce symptoms and improve your quality of life.

"You won't know how good you didn't feel. I mean, that's like triple-negatives, but it is that. All of a sudden you-- "Oh my gosh. Six months ago I felt this bad, didn't know it," and now because of what's been available to me and these people who do such fantastic work that it allows you to do so much more if you're willing to do it, It's up here and it's in here, and you really need to have that part of your life."