

Understanding the TAVR Procedure

Aortic valve disease is a serious condition that can lead to serious symptoms and if left untreated may cause heart failure.

For many patients, the best treatment is to replace a damaged aortic valve with a new mechanical valve.

This may be done as regular open-heart surgery, or you may be a candidate for a procedure called transcatheter aortic valve replacement, or TAVR.

TAVR is a newer procedure that is minimally invasive which means it is easier for the patient, with an easier recovery and less time spent in the hospital.

It is a good option for patients who have limited choices for repair or may not be candidates for open heart surgery because of the risks.

“The advantage for the patient is the simplicity-- not simplicity but the less complex procedure, shorter hospital stay, shorter recovery and things like that.”

When you are ready to have your TAVR procedure, you will be admitted to the hospital. Before arriving, it's important to follow all of your pre-procedure instructions.

In some cases, you may be given a general anesthetic during the procedure and be completely unconscious. Or you may be awake during the procedure and given a local pain medicine. This will depend on your doctor's recommendations.

“I was in the middle area, or maybe I like to think I was more awake than I truly was, but it seemed to go very well and a lot of people involved, and it was so well-done it was literally painless.”

To perform the valve replacement, the doctor will make a small incision, usually in your leg or chest. This is where the catheter carrying the new valve will be inserted.

Once the catheter is inside your blood vessel, it will be carefully guided into your heart and next to your aortic valve.

Throughout this operation, your doctor will view what's going on through a special screen that makes it possible to see exactly what's happening.

When the catheter is in place, the new valve is carefully moved into position. Then the catheter is inflated like a balloon. This expands the valve into place.

The old valve is not actually removed during this procedure. Instead, the new replacement valve is placed inside the old valve.

Once the new valve is firmly attached in place, the catheter is taken out through the same incision.

“We typically see our patients back in a week to make sure all the sites look all okay and patients are feeling well and make sure there's no surprises.”

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The TAVR procedure has an excellent safety record. And because it is minimally invasive, it can be performed on people who are older and less healthy, often resulting in a major improvement of their symptoms and quality of life.

If you have questions about your TAVR procedure, make sure to ask your physician and follow all of your instructions to make your procedure and recovery go as smoothly as possible.