

Heart Valve Repair or Replacement

Your heart pumps blood throughout your body. It has 4 valves. With every heartbeat, they open and close like doors to keep blood flowing the right way through your heart.

Sometimes a valve may leak or become narrow. A leaky valve no longer closes all the way, letting blood flow backward. This problem is called regurgitation.

If a valve narrows, it may not open all the way, slowing the forward flow of blood. This problem is called stenosis. Heart valve surgery repairs or replaces a damaged heart valve.

Before the surgery, you'll be given medicines that put you to sleep.

Your surgeon makes a cut down the center of your chest. They open your breastbone to reach your heart.

Your heart is then stopped with medicine. You will be connected to a heart-lung machine to keep blood pumping throughout your body during the surgery.

What happens next depends on your exact valve problem. To repair a valve, your surgeon may trim or reshape the valve to help it work better. They may need to repair a torn flap, or separate flaps that have fused together. Or they may reinforce the ring of tissue that supports the valve.

If the valve is beyond repair, your surgeon removes it. They replace it with a mechanical valve or one made of human or animal tissue.

When the repair or replacement is done, your surgeon will restart your heart. They will sew your breastbone back together with wire, and close your chest with stitches or staples.

After surgery, you may be in the hospital for 5 to 7 days. It usually takes 4 to 8 weeks to fully recover.

Heart valve repair or replacement surgery can improve blood flow, help you feel better, and prolong your life.