

Aortic Stenosis: What You Should Know

What is aortic stenosis?

It is the narrowing of the aortic valve, a doorway-like opening in your heart that allows the blood to flow from your heart to other parts of your body. This narrowing (called stenosis) makes your heart work harder to pump blood. Aortic stenosis may get worse over time.

Who gets it?

It usually happens in people older than 65 years. But some people have a problem with their aortic valve that makes them more likely to get it earlier. You are more likely to get it if you smoke or have high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol.

How can I tell if I have it?

There are usually no symptoms until the narrowing becomes severe. You may have shortness of breath, chest pain, and dizziness or fainting, especially during physical activity.

Your doctor may listen to your heart to check whether it is beating normally. If it isn't, you will need a test called an echocardiogram (eh-koh-KAR-dee-uh-gram) to see what is causing the abnormal heartbeat. If you have aortic stenosis, ask your doctor if it is safe for you to exercise or do other physical activity.

How is it treated?

You may not need treatment if the aortic stenosis is not bad or if you don't have symptoms. But your doctor will check your heart regularly to see whether the disease is getting worse. Once you have symptoms, you will need surgery to replace the valve.

What if I have symptoms?

Tell your doctor right away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Increased shortness of breath
- Chest pain, pressure, or tightness
- Dizziness or fainting
- Getting tired easily or a decrease in normal activity
- Ankle swelling

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Heart Association

http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/HeartValveProblemsandDisease/Problem-Aortic-Valve-Stenosis_UCM_450437_Article.jsp

National Institutes of Health

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000178.htm>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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