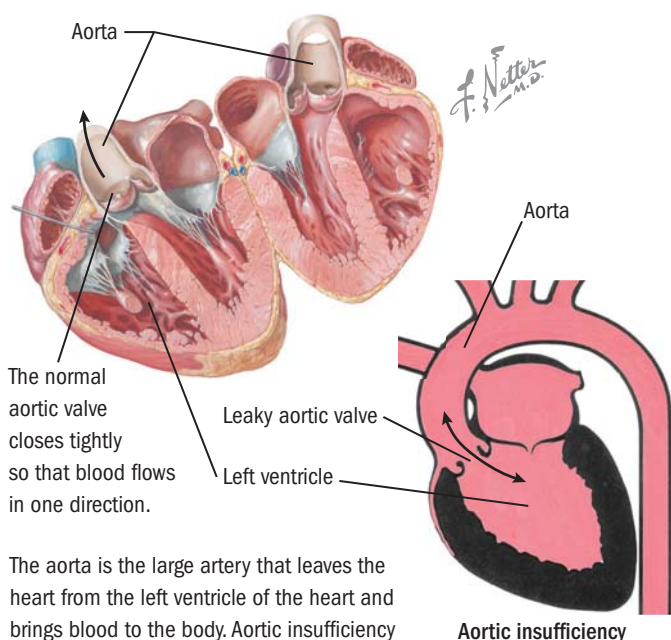


MANAGING YOUR AORTIC INSUFFICIENCY



The normal aortic valve closes tightly so that blood flows in one direction.

The aorta is the large artery that leaves the heart from the left ventricle of the heart and brings blood to the body. Aortic insufficiency is the leaking of blood back into the heart from the aorta.

Aortic insufficiency



Symptoms, when present, include tiredness, chest pain, difficulty breathing, and coughing.

The doctor diagnoses aortic insufficiency by a physical examination and echocardiography.



What Is Aortic Insufficiency?

The aorta is the large artery that leaves the heart from the left lower chamber (ventricle). The aortic valve is between the left ventricle and the aorta. Aortic insufficiency (or aortic regurgitation) is the leaking of blood from the aorta through the aortic valve into the left ventricle when the ventricle contracts.

Aortic insufficiency causes the left ventricle to get larger because of the extra blood in it.

What Causes Aortic Insufficiency?

The cause is a defective aortic valve or enlarged bottom part of the aorta. Infections such as rheumatic fever (usually from streptococcal infections) and endocarditis (bacterial infection in the heart) affect the valve. Congenital abnormalities such as bicuspid valve (two valve sections instead of three) are a common cause. Direct blunt injury (e.g., the chest hitting a steering wheel in an accident), connective tissue disorders such as Marfan's disease, and hypertension can also lead to an enlarged aorta and subsequent aortic insufficiency.

What Are the Symptoms of Aortic Insufficiency?

Most people have no symptoms in early stages. Symptoms when present are tiredness, chest pain, difficulty breathing (especially when lying down), coughing, and shortness of breath.

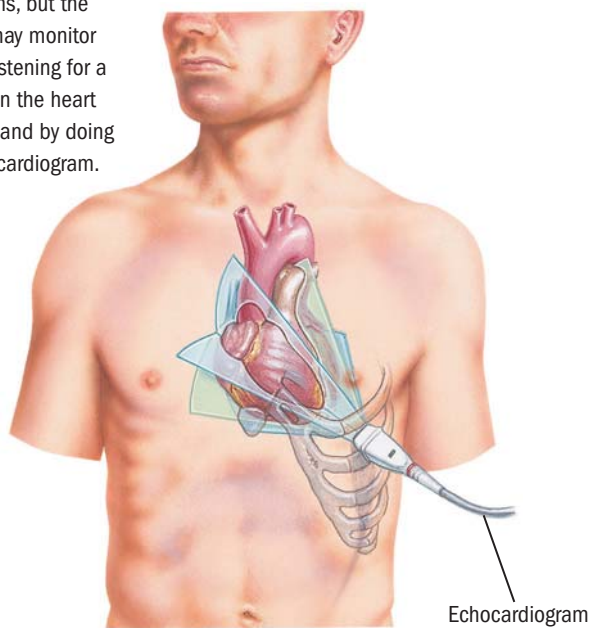
How Is Aortic Insufficiency Diagnosed?

The doctor makes a diagnosis from a physical examination. Blood flowing through the valve creates a heart murmur (extra or unusual sound during the heartbeat) that the doctor hears with the stethoscope. The doctor will recommend echocardiography (a test that uses ultrasound waves to give a picture of the heart) to confirm the diagnosis.

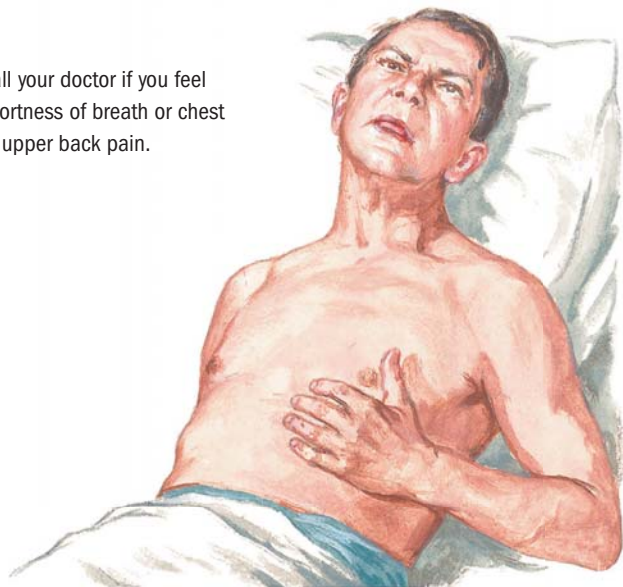
For severe insufficiency with effects on the heart's function, the doctor may suggest cardiac catheterization. In catheterization a small tube (catheter) is inserted into a leg artery and passed into the heart to get pictures of the heart and determine the severity of the aortic insufficiency.

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You may not have symptoms, but the doctor may monitor you by listening for a change in the heart murmur and by doing an echocardiogram.



Call your doctor if you feel shortness of breath or chest or upper back pain.



How Is Aortic Insufficiency Treated?

For people without symptoms, the doctor may recommend regular check-ups including echocardiograms. If testing shows worsening aortic insufficiency and/or an enlarged heart, the doctor may suggest seeing a thoracic surgeon (a specialist who performs heart valve operations) to correct or replace the valve.

People with symptoms may also need medicines to prevent fluid and pressure from building up in the heart. The doctor may also recommend referral to a thoracic surgeon in anticipation of future need for surgery.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Aortic Insufficiency:

- ✓ **DO** remember that you may not have symptoms but may need to be checked with echocardiograms to follow the valve disease.
- ✓ **DO** take antibiotics (if prescribed) before dental or surgical procedures if you had infectious endocarditis or prior heart surgery.
- ✓ **DO** ask your doctor for referral to a cardiologist (a doctor who specializes in heart diseases) if you are having symptoms.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you get shortness of breath, chest or upper back pain, palpitations or rapid heartbeat, or fainting.
- ⊗ **DON'T** do strenuous exercise if you have severe insufficiency.
- ⊗ **DON'T** forget that periodic checkups to monitor for aortic insufficiency and its effect on the heart are important.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Heart Association
Tel: (800) 242-8721
Website: <http://www.americanheart.org>
- American College of Cardiology
Tel: (800) 253-4636
Website: <http://www.acc.org>
- Heart Center Online
Website: <http://www.heartcenteronline.com>