

MANAGING YOUR AORTIC STENOSIS



Aortic valve stenosis (AVS) is a disorder in which the opening of the aortic valve in the heart is too small or too stiff. The heart becomes enlarged and weak. AVS occurs more often in men than women.

Two-sided valve



Three-sided valve



A valve is like a doorway. The normal aortic valve has three flaps (leaflets). Some people are born with a two-sided (bicuspid) valve instead of a normal, three-sided valve.

People with AVS will have a heart murmur, which is an extra or unusual sound of blood flow through the valve during the heartbeat.



What Is Aortic Stenosis?

Aortic valve stenosis (AVS) is a disorder in which the opening of the aortic valve in the heart is too small or stiff. A valve is like a doorway, and the aortic valve is one of four valves controlling blood flow inside the heart. A normal aortic valve has three flaps (leaflets). The heart sends oxygen rich blood to the body through this valve. In AVS, the heart works harder to pump blood through the smaller opening. This extra effort can make the heart grow big and weak.

AVS occurs about three times more often in men than in women.

What Causes Aortic Stenosis?

Calcium and cholesterol deposits on the valve that occur with aging are the most common cause. Some people are born with damaged valves or have a two-sided (bicuspid), not three-sided, valve. Heart disease or rheumatic fever from childhood infections may also damage the valve.

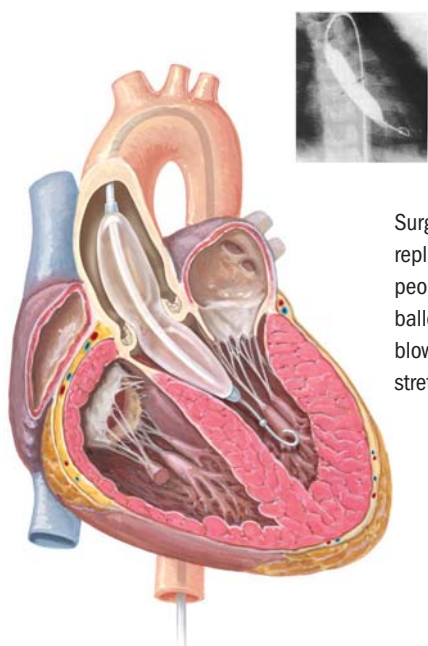
What Are the Symptoms of Aortic Stenosis?

Most people at first have no symptoms. If the valve narrows enough, feeling tired, fainting with exercise, having chest pain with exercise or at rest, or having symptoms of left-sided heart failure (e.g., shortness of breath) may occur. Breathing problems during exercise may progress to problems at rest, or waking up at night unable to breathe.

How Is Aortic Stenosis Diagnosed?

The doctor will take a medical history and do a physical examination. The doctor may hear a heart murmur (an extra or unusual sound of blood flow through the valve during the heartbeat). If AVS is suspected, the doctor will order echocardiography (using sound waves to take heart pictures) to diagnose AVS.

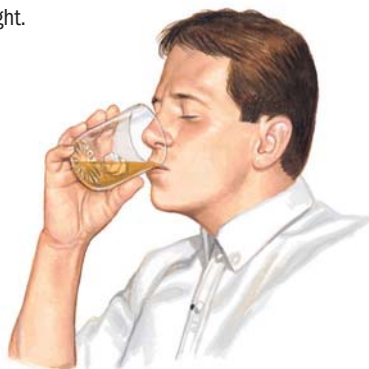
Additional tests such as heart catheterization (using x-rays and dye) may be done before surgery to replace the valve in order to estimate how severe the aortic stenosis is.



Surgical treatment involves replacing the valve. Young people may have a special balloon put in the valve and blown up, so the valve stretches open (valvuloplasty).



Ask your doctor about exercising, taking medicines, starting a low-salt diet, and losing weight.



Don't become dehydrated, which can make your symptoms worse.

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How Is Aortic Stenosis Treated?

People without symptoms and with mild stenosis may not need treatment but should be monitored on a periodic basis by their doctor. For people with symptoms or severe disease, surgery to replace the valve is best.

Sometimes, a special balloon is put in the valve and blown up so the valve stretches (valvuloplasty). Valvuloplasty is often used in younger people who will get a replacement valve after they grow.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Aortic Stenosis:

- ✓ **DO** ask your doctor if you can exercise.
- ✓ **DO** stop smoking.
- ✓ **DO** start a low-salt diet and lose weight if you have congestive heart failure.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if, after you get a new valve, you have chest pain, shortness of breath, palpitations or rapid heart-beat, fainting, sudden weakness in an arm or leg, eyesight problems, fever, or blood from the surgery site.
- ⊗ **DON'T** become dehydrated. Dehydration will worsen aortic stenosis.
- ⊗ **DON'T** use any over-the-counter medicine without asking your doctor.
- ⊗ **DON'T** ignore worsening symptoms.

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>