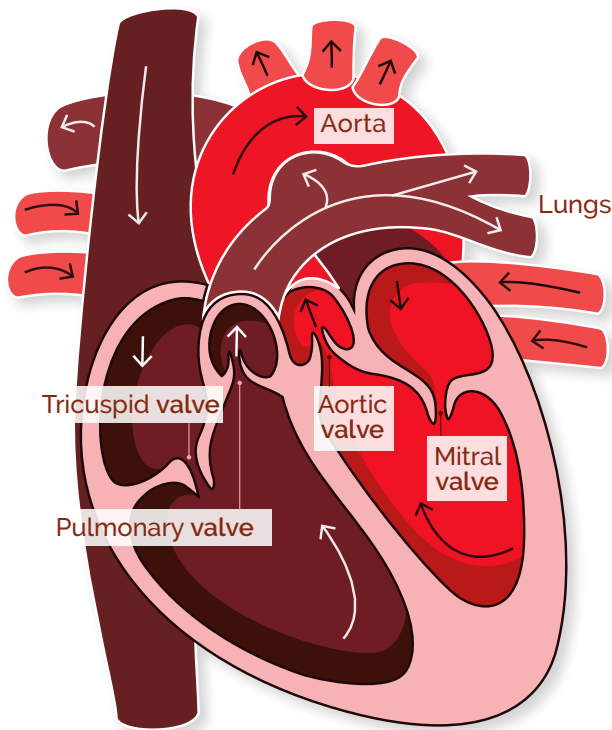


Explaining Heart Valve Disease



Heart Valves and Blood Flow



Each heart valve has flaps that open only one way. They open and close as the heart beats, allowing blood to flow in one direction.

Your Heart Valves



Any problem with a heart valve can interfere with the flow of blood through your heart, which means your heart has to work harder to pump blood to your lungs and body. Over time, the condition can get worse.

If a valve is leaky, if its opening is too narrow, or if it doesn't open the way it is supposed to, the blood can't flow properly.

Stenosis

Normal aortic valve



Closed



Open

Aortic stenosis



Closed



Open

A valve with **stenosis** is narrow and stiff. The valve can't open fully, and blood can't flow freely through it.

Prolapse

Normal mitral valve



Closed



Open

Mitral valve with prolapse



Closed



Open

A **prolapsed** valve cannot close completely, allowing blood to leak backward (a process called regurgitation).

Sometimes a valve doesn't form at all. This is a congenital heart defect called **atresia** that may require surgery.

Signs & Symptoms of Heart Valve Disease



Since your heart is working harder, you may notice:



Fatigue



Dizziness or fainting



Rapid weight gain because you're retaining fluids



Swelling around the eyes, ankles, or abdomen



Chest pain



Heart is beating irregularly

Your health care team may hear a heart murmur through a stethoscope. A heart murmur is the sound of blood flowing through the heart. Many heart murmurs are harmless, but a heart murmur can be a sign that a valve isn't working properly.

If your health care team thinks you might have heart valve disease, they might refer you for a test called an echocardiogram or to a cardiologist.



Visit [CDC.gov/KnowYourHeart](https://www.cdc.gov/KnowYourHeart) for heart valve disease resources and information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.