

# Aortic Valve Replacement

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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## What is aortic valve disease?

Your aortic valve is a one-way valve that controls the flow of blood from the main pumping chamber (left ventricle) into your aorta (the artery that carries oxygen-rich blood from your heart to the rest of your body).

Aortic valve disease is where the valve does not open properly or is narrowed, or does not close properly.

A valve that does not open properly or is narrowed makes it harder for your heart to pump blood around your body. As the problem gets worse you may get dizzy, breathless or have chest pain.

## What are the benefits of surgery?

You should get improved breathing, less chest pain and more energy, and have a better quality of life.

You should live longer with surgery.

## Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Medication is the main alternative to surgery.

Instead of open heart surgery, you may be able to have an aortic valve replaced through a catheter (tube) in an artery in your groin.

## What will happen if I decide not to have the operation or the operation is delayed?

You will continue to be given medication to try to control your symptoms but they may get worse.

Your heart will need to work harder to pump blood around your body, leading to damage and heart failure. If you are considered high risk, it is unlikely that the operation will be delayed.

Emergency services must be contacted if you experience the following:

- Increased breathlessness.
- Increased frequency and duration of chest pain.

- Feeling like you are going to faint (light-headed, dizzy, feeling sick, trouble hearing, suddenly sweaty).
- Fainting.

## What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes 2 to 3 hours.

Your surgeon will make a cut down the front of your chest, through your breastbone (sternum). You will be connected to a heart-lung machine, which allows your heart to be still while your surgeon replaces the valve.

There are two main types of replacement valve.

- Mechanical valves
- Tissue valves

## How can I prepare myself for the operation?

Bad teeth and gums can cause infection of the lining of your heart and the new heart valve. Keep your teeth and gums as healthy as possible, and go to your dentist regularly for a check-up. You should not have the operation if you have poor dental hygiene or a dental infection.

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

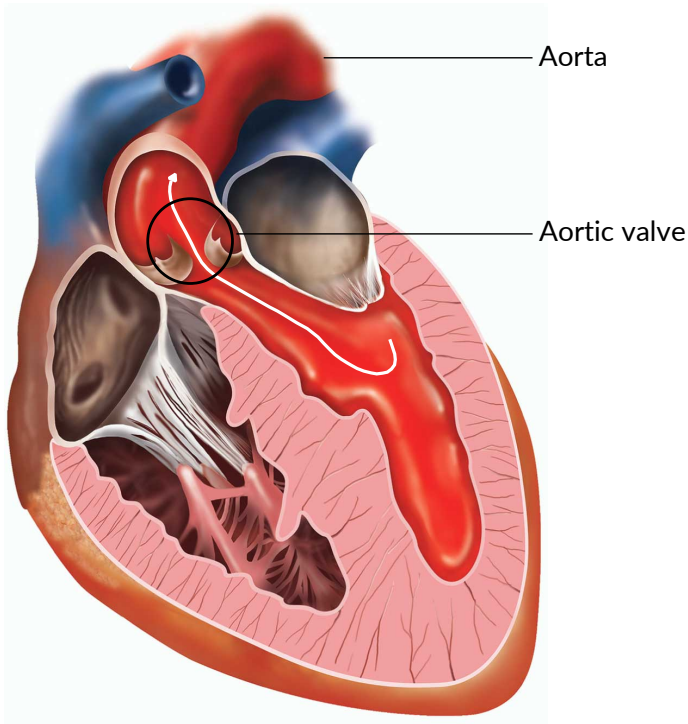
Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight. Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Speak to the healthcare team about any vaccinations you might need to reduce your risk of serious illness while you recover. When you come into hospital, practise hand washing and wear a face covering when asked.

## What complications can happen?

### General complications of any operation

- Bleeding



An open aortic valve

- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- Acute kidney injury
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Venous thromboembolism (VTE)
- Chest infection

### Specific complications of this operation

- Stroke
- Infection of the replacement valve
- Heart attack
- Death

### Consequences of this procedure

- Pain
- Unsightly scarring of your skin

### How soon will I recover?

After the operation you will be transferred to the cardiac intensive care unit or high dependency unit for a few days, so the healthcare team can monitor you more closely. You will then go to the ward.

You should be able to go home after 7 to 10 days.

The healthcare team will tell you when you can return to normal activities.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a good recovery, with no more shortness of breath or chest pain. You may have more energy after you recover.

### Summary

Aortic valve disease can cause pain, shortness of breath and eventually death. Aortic valve replacement can relieve your pain, improve your breathing and energy levels, and may help you to live longer.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Reviewer**

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### **Illustrator**

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