



YOUR INFORMATION

Valve Disease

VALVE DISEASE

Your diagnosis

You have been given a diagnosis of heart failure, which usually means your heart is working inefficiently. This inefficiency is usually due to two main causes: firstly, the incapacity of the heart to pump correctly and secondly, its inability to relax sufficiently to fill up with blood. There is generally an underlying problem which has caused this inefficiency. Occasionally, we don't know the exact cause of why your heart is working inefficiently (clinicians call this idiopathic). The question most patients want answering is "WHY is my heart not working efficiently; what has gone wrong?"

We believe that the cause of your heart failure is due to **damage to the valves of your heart.**

What do the valves do and why is it important?

The heart is divided into four chambers and in order for the blood to flow from one chamber to another, there are valves that function as gates. They open and close so that the blood does not flow backwards and ensures it flows in the right direction. If there are problems with one or more of the valves, this can affect how efficiently the heart pumps. This is termed heart failure. Your doctors have found that you have a problem with a valve in your heart as result of it being damaged or diseased. There are usually two problems that your doctor may say is wrong with the valve:

Stenosis

The valve is stiff so cannot open and close properly, meaning that the heart has to work harder having to force the blood to pass through the stiff valve.

Regurgitation

This means that the valve leaks. As a result, the heart has to pump harder due to the blood leaking backwards, so it has to do extra work to get the blood to where it should be flowing.

Why have I got this?

There are a number of reasons why valves become damaged; you can ask your doctor which of the following reasons has caused your valve to be affected, leading to your heart not pumping efficiently.

- **You may have been born with a damaged valve; this is termed congenital heart disease.**
- **As we get older our valves can become thick and decline due to general wear and tear. This may affect either one or more of your valves.**
- **Regurgitation - If your heart is enlarged due to the muscle of your heart being damaged, this may have resulted in a valve being stretched and therefore leaking blood.**
- **Rheumatic fever - You may have been asked by your doctors if you have ever had rheumatic fever in the past. Previously, this rare condition was not able to be treated with antibiotics, which prevents the valve of the heart being affected by the condition. It is only later in life that it is realised that the valves have been damaged by the rheumatic fever many years ago when antibiotics were not available.**
- **Endocarditis - The endocardium is one of the layers of your heart; you may have an infection that has damaged this layer of your heart and it has infected and damaged the valves.**

How do you know that this is the reason why my heart is failing to do its job efficiently?

Your symptoms and a full history of what has been happening to you will have been noted by your team of doctors and nurses. They will have conducted various tests and investigations, in order to diagnose a problem with the valves of your heart. This include various blood tests, X-rays, tracing of your heart (ECGs), scans of your heart (echos) and perhaps angiography (where a dye has been given through one of your veins, which shows how the blood flows through the heart via X-ray). It may be that the first time your doctor recognised there may be problems with your heart was when they listened to it through a stethoscope. This is when we can hear the blood pass through the valves and can distinguish both which valve and what kind of problem is occurring due to a particular noise.

What is the treatment I will receive for this underlying cause of my heart failure?

This will very much depend on how severe your symptoms are. They may be mild, moderate or severe. It will also depend on how the valves which are damaged have affected the pumping capacity of your heart and also your general health.

- **One option is replace or repair the affected valve. This is major open heart surgery, therefore your doctors will discuss in detail all the implications of having surgery and whether it is the best option for you.**
- **If it is the aortic valve which is damaged, you may be offered a Transthoracic Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVI). In this procedure, the surgeon is able to thread a replacement valve through a blood vessel in your groin or one near your collar bone. The replacement valve is then able to sit over the aortic valve that is damaged. This avoids having to have open heart surgery, but is still a major procedure. It is a relatively new procedure and therefore not available at many specialist centres as yet. However, if you have other medical conditions that rule out having major heart surgery, this is a procedure that may be an option for you.**
- **In terms of medicines, your team of doctors may recommend that you remain on medication only. This may be due to your mild symptoms and the fact that you do not require any form of surgery to the damaged valve at this time. If that is the case, they will ensure that you are seen regularly in order to assess how your valve is performing, with regular echos of your heart. Or that as a result of other medical conditions that have affected your overall health, surgery would be too risky a procedure for you. It may be the case that due to the poor functioning of your heart it would not be possible to perform any form of surgery on it.**

Do not hesitate to discuss any of the treatments mentioned above with your doctors and nurses, as they will have the results of all your tests and investigations, which will provide a clear picture of the best options that will be available to you in order to effectively treat your heart condition.



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Review date September 2019