



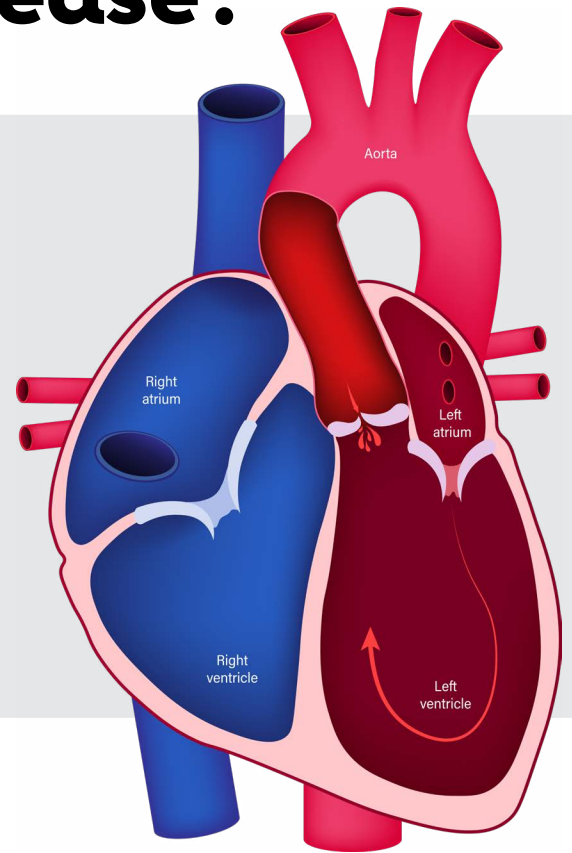
American  
Heart  
Association.

# What is Heart Valve Disease?

Heart valve disease occurs when one of the heart's four valves stops functioning properly.

**MORE THAN  
5 MILLION**  
Americans have  
heart valve disease.  
It's most common  
in older adults.

Valves keep blood pumping through the heart. When a valve opens, blood empties from one of the heart's four chambers. When it closes, it prevents blood from leaking backward.



Some people have no symptoms.  
But poorly functioning heart valves can cause:



Chest pain



Palpitations



Shortness  
of breath



Fatigue



Weakness



Lightheadedness



Fainting



Swollen ankles,  
feet or abdomen

As people age, heart valves may malfunction if:

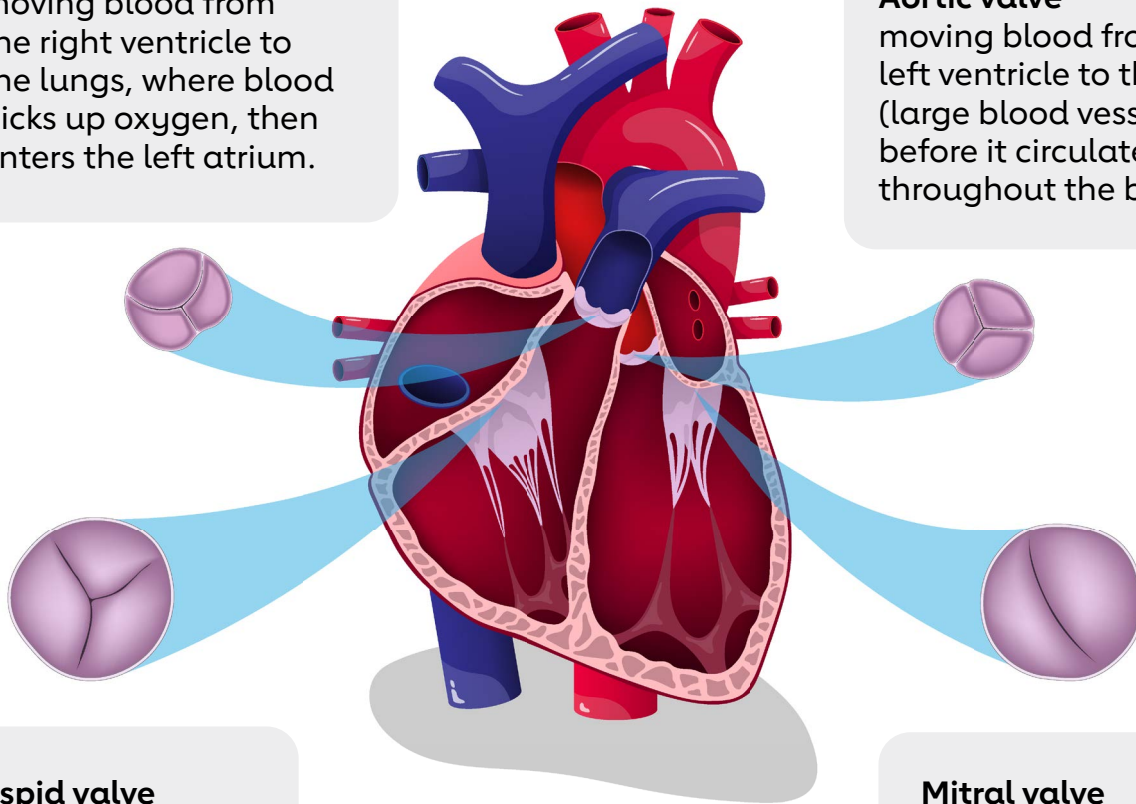
- Calcium deposits build up, which stiffens valves.
- Valve wear and tear causes leaks.

*\*Heart valve disease can also occur earlier in life. Some babies are born with malfunctioning heart valves.*

**When blood passes through the heart, it goes through the:**

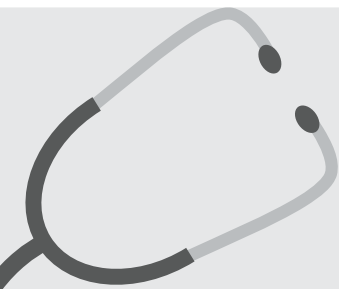
**Pulmonary valve**  
moving blood from the right ventricle to the lungs, where blood picks up oxygen, then enters the left atrium.

**Aortic valve**  
moving blood from the left ventricle to the aorta (large blood vessel), before it circulates throughout the body.



**Tricuspid valve**  
moving oxygen-poor blood from the right atrium to the right ventricle.

**Mitral valve**  
moving oxygen-rich blood from the left atrium to the left ventricle.



**Your health care professional can listen to your heart for whooshing sounds that could suggest valve disease.**

Early detection may prevent further health problems and improve quality of life. You may need:

- ✓ Valve repair
- ✓ Valve replacement

**After surgery, many people can return to a healthy, active life. For more information, visit [heart.org/heartvalves](https://heart.org/heartvalves)**