

Initial Consultation Guide

This initial consultation guide is designed to help you prepare for an appointment with your doctor and will help support an efficient, informative, and helpful consultation. This document provides you with information on heart valve disease and outlines the types of questions your doctor may ask you during the consultation. It also provides a list of the most pertinent questions you should ask your doctor during the appointment.

ABOUT HEART VALVE DISEASE

Heart valve disease is the name given to any malfunction or abnormality of one or more of the heart's four valves, affecting blood flow through the heart. The condition is usually caused by wear, disease, or damage of one or more of the heart's valves.

The heart has four chambers that pump blood around the body. There are a series of valves in the heart that, when working properly, ensure blood flows in the right direction through the heart's chambers, which are closed off by a one-way valve. Diseased or defective heart valves – those that have become narrowed (stenosis), leaky (regurgitation), or both – may not open or close properly and can interfere with the flow of blood.

SYMPTOMS OF HEART VALVE DISEASE

The signs and symptoms of heart valve disease include, but are not limited to coughing, shortness of breath, fainting, chest tightness/pain, fatigue, light-headedness or dizziness, and abnormal heart rhythm sensations (i.e. irregular heartbeat).

These symptoms are not always severe or visible and are often seen as a part of the natural aging process, meaning the symptoms are classified as 'asymptomatic'. They are also similar to symptoms of other forms of heart disease and lung-related problems. This is why it is important to consult with your healthcare practitioner if you have any of the mentioned symptoms.

If you are experiencing new, worsened, or severe symptoms of heart valve disease, it is important to immediately seek medical attention.

QUESTIONS YOUR DOCTOR MAY ASK

When meeting with your doctor to discuss the symptoms that have been concerning you, they are likely to ask you various questions to gain a better understanding of your health and assist them in making a diagnosis. Questions may include:

MEDICAL HISTORY & LIFESTYLE

- Do you suffer from any other medical illnesses?
- Are you taking any medication?
- Do you or anyone in your family suffer from heart conditions (e.g. heart murmur)?
- Do you experience high levels or receive treatment for stress, anxiety, or depression?
- How is your quality of sleep?

YOUR SYMPTOMS

- **Have you been feeling short of breath?** *If so*, how often and does it affect your everyday activities?
- **Have you experienced chest pain?** *If so*, how frequently does it occur, how long does it last and how would you describe the type of pain?
- **Are you suffering from tiredness and fatigue?** *If so*, how often? Do you constantly feel tired and fatigued or is it intermittently? What about after a good night's sleep?
- **Have you felt dizzy/faint?** *If so*, how frequently and in what scenario?
- **Have you experienced heart palpitations?** *If so*, how often and in what circumstances do they occur?
- **Are you experiencing an irregular heartbeat?** *If so*, how did you notice and how often does it occur?
- **Do you feel older than your age?** *If so*, sometimes or often?
- **Are you finding it difficult to exercise and move around as easily as you use to?** *If so*, is this a constant issue or do you find it is only in certain situations? (i.e. when you are at home, walking upstairs, going shopping, exercising, etc.)
- **Have you altered your exercise regime in the past year?** *If so*, how?

It is important to answer the questions as honestly and with as much detail as possible. Tracking your symptoms prior to your appointment can help you with remembering and sharing relevant information pertaining to your health. Keeping note of your symptoms for at least two (2) weeks prior to your appointment is recommended to ensure that any important trends in signs and symptoms have time to be noticed. To help with this, our symptom tracker is available below.

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD SYMPTOM TRACKER](#)

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

DIAGNOSING HEART VALVE DISEASE

Diagnosing heart valve disease typically starts with a simple stethoscope check. Your doctor will use a stethoscope to listen to your heart for the characteristic heart murmur or click-murmur that is usually the first indication of heart valve disorder.

Therefore, the most important thing you can ask your doctor to do if you think you may have heart valve disease is to perform a stethoscope check.

After an initial diagnosis, a more sophisticated investigation with either an echocardiogram or another form of heart scan can be undertaken to understand the exact type of heart valve disease and the severity of the abnormality. Questions regarding further diagnostic tests/procedures are included in the list below.

QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE USEFUL TO YOU

Should your doctor find reason to suspect heart valve disease, you should be confident in asking questions to get all the information and guidance you need:

- **Why am I experiencing these symptoms?**
- **Is this a long-term condition?**
- **Will I have to have further tests / see a specialist?**
- **What will these tests involve?**
- **If a diagnosis of heart valve disease is confirmed, are there lifestyle changes I can make to manage the condition or will I need treatment?**
- **What signs and symptoms should I watch for that mean I should seek urgent care and/or go to the emergency room?**
- **What are the treatments for heart valve disease?**
- **Which healthcare professionals will be treating me if I have heart valve disease?**
- **How effective is the treatment of heart valve disease?**
- **Is my condition curable?**
- **How much will my quality of life change?**

***NOTE:** Heart Valve Voice Canada is providing suggested questions and symptoms of heart valve disease in order to help patients speak to their doctor. This resource is by no way conclusive and should not be used to self-diagnose heart valve disease or other health conditions.*