

Health Awareness

Valve Disease: Getting To The Heart Of The Matter

(NAPSA)—There is hopeful news for the estimated 5 million Americans who are diagnosed with heart valve disease each year.

Defects in heart valves can exist from birth or develop from damage later in life. Fortunately, valve disease can usually be successfully treated with surgery in patients of all ages.

If you have been diagnosed with valve disease, have a heart murmur or think you may be experiencing symptoms, be sure to talk with your doctor.

Valve Disease Is Not A Normal Part Of Aging

Many of the symptoms of valve disease are inaccurately mistaken for the “normal signs of aging.” Age is not a reason to not have valve disease surgery, and valve disease can usually be successfully treated in patients of all ages.

Diagnosis Is Key

The only way to really know is to be diagnosed by a doctor, so see yours right away if you are told you have a murmur or you are experiencing any of these:

- Shortness of breath
- Weakness or dizziness
- Pain, tightness or discomfort in the chest
- Fainting or feeling faint
- Fatigue
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Light-headedness
- Decrease in exercise capacity
- Swollen abdomen or ankles and feet.

According to the Alliance for Aging Research, many of these symptoms will only happen during activity, but as the disease gets worse, they may also happen while resting.

Complications Are Possible

When valve damage reduces blood flow, the heart has to work harder and the body gets less oxy-



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gen—leading to a number of symptoms. However, people with valve disease do not always have symptoms, even if their disease is severe. For these people, a heart murmur is the most important clue. Others may have symptoms with less severe disease.

Some types of valve disease can lead to serious complications, including death. However, most can be successfully treated with surgery.

Resources Are Available

The Alliance for Aging Research recently made a number of podcasts available. The purpose of the program is to raise awareness about the disease, its risk factors, treatment options, tips on effective physician-patient communication and more—all in an effort to encourage patients to seek appropriate care.

The Alliance was founded in 1986 to promote medical and behavioral research into the aging process. Learn more at www.agingresearch.org.