

# Valvular Heart Disease: A Comprehensive Guide to Its Causes, Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatment

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## Valvular Heart Disease (Cardiovascular Medicine)

by Blase A. Carabello

★★★★☆ 4 out of 5

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Valvular heart disease is a condition that affects the valves of the heart. These valves are responsible for ensuring that blood flows in the correct direction through the heart. When one or more of these valves becomes damaged or diseased, it can lead to a number of health problems.

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## Causes of Valvular Heart Disease

There are many different causes of valvular heart disease. Some of the most common include:

- Congenital heart defects: These are heart defects that are present at birth. They can affect any of the heart's valves, and they can range in severity from mild to severe.
- Rheumatic fever: This is a bacterial infection that can damage the heart's valves. It is most commonly seen in children and young adults.
- Endocarditis: This is an infection of the heart's inner lining. It can also damage the heart's valves.
- Atherosclerosis: This is a condition in which plaque builds up in the arteries. It can narrow the arteries and restrict blood flow to the heart. Atherosclerosis can also damage the heart's valves.
- Aging: The heart's valves can become weakened and damaged over time. This is especially true in people over the age of 65.

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## **Symptoms of Valvular Heart Disease**

The symptoms of valvular heart disease can vary depending on the severity of the condition. Some of the most common symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Fatigue
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Swelling in the feet, ankles, or legs
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat

- Hoarseness
- Cough

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## **Diagnosis of Valvular Heart Disease**

Valvular heart disease is diagnosed with a physical exam and a listening to sounds of the heart with a stethoscope. The doctor may also order one or more of the following tests:

- Echocardiogram: This is an ultrasound test that uses sound waves to create images of the heart. It can show the structure and function of the heart's valves.
- Electrocardiogram (ECG): This test records the electrical activity of the heart. It can show if the heart is beating irregularly.
- Chest X-ray: This test can show the size and shape of the heart. It can also show if there is any fluid buildup in the lungs.
- Cardiac catheterization: This test involves inserting a thin tube into a blood vessel in the groin and threading it up to the heart. This allows the doctor to inject dye into the heart and take pictures of the heart's valves.

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## **Treatment of Valvular Heart Disease**

The treatment of valvular heart disease depends on the severity of the condition. In some cases, no treatment is necessary. In other cases,

treatment may involve medication, surgery, or a combination of both.

Medication can be used to improve the function of the heart's valves and to relieve symptoms. Some of the most common medications used to treat valvular heart disease include:

- diuretics
- ACE inhibitors
- beta-blockers
- calcium channel blockers

Surgery may be necessary to repair or replace a damaged or diseased heart valve. The type of surgery that is performed depends on the severity of the condition and the location of the valve that is affected.

After treatment, regular follow-up care is important to monitor the condition of the heart's valves and to make sure that the treatment is working. Follow-up care may include regular physical exams, echocardiograms, and other tests.

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## **Prevention of Valvular Heart Disease**

There is no sure way to prevent valvular heart disease, but there are some things that can be done to reduce the risk of developing the condition.

These include:

- Getting regular physical activity

- Eating a healthy diet
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Not smoking
- Getting vaccinated against rheumatic fever

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Valvular heart disease is a serious condition, but it can be managed with proper treatment. If you have any of the symptoms of valvular heart disease, see your doctor right away. Early diagnosis and treatment can help to improve the outcome of the condition.



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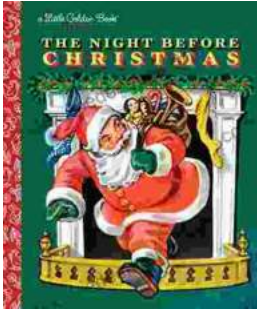
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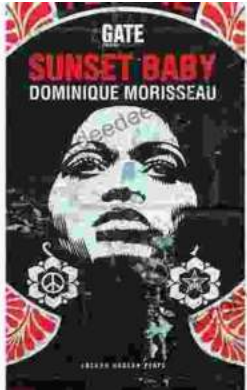
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