

# Overcoming the Challenges: Helping Women With Heart Valve Disease



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## WHAT IS IT?

Heart valve disease (HVD) is also called valvular heart disease (VHD). With HVD, a patient's heart valve function gets progressively worse unless it's treated.

HVD includes a narrowing of the heart valve (called **stenosis**) or a leaking heart valve (called **regurgitation**).

## WHAT DO HEART VALVES DO?

ONE WAY

ONE WAY

Each of the four chambers of the heart has a valve at its exit. The **mitral valve** and the **tricuspid valve** control blood flow from the **atria** to the **ventricles**. The **aortic valve** and the **pulmonary valve** control blood flow out of the ventricles. The valves keep the blood flowing one way through the heart with no backward leakage.

## HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE HVD?

As many as

**11.6 MILLION AMERICANS**

Approximately **1 in 50 women of all ages**

**1 in 13 women** age 65–75

**1 in 10 women** age 75 and up

## WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF HVD?

### ♥ **Aortic stenosis**

affects **1 in 4 women** over the age of 65

### ♥ **Aortic regurgitation or insufficiency**

affects approximately **8% of women**

### ♥ **Mitral regurgitation or insufficiency**

may affect **2%-3% of women**

### ♥ **Mitral stenosis is three times**

**more common** in women than men



## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO DIAGNOSIS?

- Women often ignore their symptoms and delay seeing their health professionals.
- Once they do see a health professional, women are less likely to be diagnosed with HVD, which can lead to greater damage to the heart.
- HVD affects each woman differently depending on her age, physical conditions, emotional well-being, and the disease severity, making diagnosis complicated.

## OTHER BARRIERS ARE:

- Lack of access to care.
- Not receiving timely referrals to specialists.
- Lack of trust, understanding, and clear communication between health professionals and African American patients.
- Socioeconomic factors, which could include work experience, occupation, income, and education.
- The combination of the cost of care and access to care.

## HOW ARE AFRICAN AMERICANS AFFECTED?



**45%** of African American women age 20 and older have high blood pressure.



**Chronic high blood pressure** increases the likelihood of heart failure, one of the main risk factors for HVD.



Another contributing factor is untreated **strep throat**, which can lead to **rheumatic fever**. Rheumatic fever can damage heart valves. This is most common in African Americans and women.

## HOW IS HVD TREATED?



In the past the standard treatment was open heart surgery. Today, **transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR)** or **transcatheter mitral valve repair** is commonly used. With these treatments, women often fair worse than men because their disease has progressed further when they get treatment.

## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO TREATMENT FOR MINORITIES?

- Minorities have **earlier onset** of HVD, which hinders their daily activities or ability to earn income.
- Hospitals and facilities where minorities typically seek treatment also tend to be ones that **don't conduct** transcatheter procedures.
- **90%** of TAVRs in the United States are done in urban teaching hospitals; **78%** of patients served by these hospitals are in higher income zip codes.
- Minorities and underserved patients are referred for TAVR **less often** than white patients.
- Minorities are at **increased risk** for poor outcomes because HVD strikes earlier (ages 65-70), they have more health factors that complicate treatment, and they have a higher risk of dying from the condition.

## RESOURCES

1. Association of Black Cardiologists, Inc. (2017). ABC Roundtable: Addressing Disparities in Contemporary Care of the Minority Patient with Valvular Heart Disease Summary Recommendations. Retrieved from [http://abc cardio.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ABC-Summary-Recommendations\\_Addressing-Disparities-in-Valvular-Heart-Disease.pdf](http://abc cardio.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ABC-Summary-Recommendations_Addressing-Disparities-in-Valvular-Heart-Disease.pdf).
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3. Alliance for Aging Research, (2015). Valve Disease in Women: Detecting & Treating Heart Valve Problems. Retrieved from [http://www.livingwithvalvedisease.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Valve-Disease-in-Women\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.livingwithvalvedisease.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Valve-Disease-in-Women_Brochure.pdf).
4. Association of Black Cardiologists, Inc. (2017). Association of Black Cardiologists Roundtable: Improving Health Care Access for Minority and High-Risk Populations Summary Recommendations. Retrieved from [http://abc cardio.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Summary\\_of\\_Recommendations.pdf](http://abc cardio.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Summary_of_Recommendations.pdf).



## WHAT CAN WE DO?

- ♥ Increase education and awareness about HVD.
- ♥ Simplify the prior authorization process.
- ♥ Advance telemedicine and telehealth to improve access to care.
- ♥ Promote pharmacy programs that improve patient access.
- ♥ Increase the number of community health workers who can help patients overcome challenges.

