

Ask *the* Expert

Could It Be My Aortic Valve?

My doctor told me that I have a heart murmur. He says it's my aortic valve. "My what...?"

Your aortic valve is only one of your four heart valves that opens and shuts about 100,000 times a day to provide blood flow to your body. A properly functioning aortic valve is a one-way valve that allows blood to freely travel in one direction only—out of your heart and into your body.

The fact that your doctor heard a heart murmur and then verified that it was indeed your aortic valve, places you amongst a group of 3 million folks in the United States that have aortic stenosis (a narrowing of the aortic heart valve). Your murmur is just a warning sign of your valve problem.

You then ask your doctor a series of questions,

"How serious is my heart problem?" and **"Do I need a valve job?"**

Your doctor will ask if you have any life-limiting signs—chest pain, fatigue, shortness of breath, or dizziness—in order to decide the seriousness of your heart valve problem. If you have any of these warning signs, you may have a dangerously narrowed aortic heart valve.

Your condition could shorten your life. You and your doctor should discuss your options—surgery vs. a watch & wait approach—along with the benefits and risks of each option. The American Heart Association guidelines can help you and your doctor with this important decision.

If the surgical option is the "best fit" option

for you, then you will be asked by your doctor to see me—a heart surgeon. We will discuss what all is involved in an aortic valve replacement surgery ("a valve job"). We will also discuss the different types of man-made heart valves available to you—tissue vs. mechanical. During your visit with me, we will talk in great detail about the surgical procedure and what you and your family can expect after surgery.

Take this opportunity to find out more about your heart's "plumbing", it may just save your life. The staff at the NEA Baptist Clinic is here for YOU!



Paul Levy, MD
Cardiovascular
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NEA BAPTIST 
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