

# Heart Valve Voice Initial Consultation Guide\*

This downloadable resource is designed to help you prepare for your visit to your GP and ensure you get the most efficient and helpful consultation possible. This document provides you with information on heart valve disease and outlines the type of questions your doctor may ask you during a consultation about potential heart valve disease. It also provides you with useful hints and tips on how to prepare for the consultation and gives you suggestions as to the most pertinent questions you should ask your doctor during the consultation.

## HEART VALVE DISEASE:

The heart has four chambers and is responsible for pumping blood around the body. There are a series of valves in the heart which, when working properly, ensure that blood flows in the right direction. Diseased or defective heart valves (those that have become narrowed “*stenosed*” or leaky “*regurgitation*”, or both) may not open or close properly and can interfere with the flow of blood.

The most common cause of heart valve disease in Western Europe is age-related degeneration of the heart valves. On occasion, heart valve disease can be caused by infection (endocarditis). There are a number of other causes also.

Historically, the most common cause of heart valve disease was rheumatic fever in childhood and adolescence which, later in life, would cause abnormalities of the heart valves. This is now uncommon in Western Europe, but remains common elsewhere in the world.

If you are experiencing shortness of breath, a cough, chest tightness, chest pain, fatigue, light-headedness or dizziness; it is important that you see your doctor, even if you think it may just be part of the ageing process. These symptoms can result from a variety of causes but, may be an indication of heart valve disease which can be treated.

## QUESTIONS YOUR GP MAY ASK:

When you see your doctor and discuss any concerns you may have about chest problems that could be an indication of heart valve disease, they are likely to run through various questions with you to gain a better understanding and help make a diagnosis. Questions may include:

### YOUR MEDICAL HISTORY

- Do you suffer from any other medical illnesses?
- Are you taking any medication?
- Do you or anyone in your family suffer from any heart conditions e.g heart murmur?

### YOUR SYMPTOMS

- Do you feel older than your age? *If so*, sometimes or often?
- 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?
- 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 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 up stairs, going to the shops or at the gym?
- Have you been feeling short of breath? *If so*, how often and does it affect your everyday activities?
- 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 altered your exercise regime in the past year? *If so*, how?
- Are you experiencing an irregular heartbeat? *If so*, how did you notice and how often does it occur?

It is important to answer the questions as honestly and with as much detail as possible. In order to help you do this, before your consultation it would be helpful to keep a diary of your symptoms for a few weeks so you are clear on what, when, where and how symptoms present. You may wish to share the symptoms tracker with your GP to provide them with more information. To help you keep track of your symptoms, please download our symptoms tracker via this link: [\[Insert link\]](#)



## WHAT SHOULD YOU ASK YOUR GP DURING YOUR CONSULTATION:

The symptoms of heart valve disease can be similar to the symptoms of other forms of heart disease or problems with the lungs. To diagnose heart valve disease, the doctor needs to use a stethoscope to listen for the characteristic heart “murmur” or “click-murmur” which is usually the first indication of a 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 give you a heart health check up by using a stethoscope to listen to your chest.

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

### THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS MAY BE USEFUL TO YOU:

- 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 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?

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