



## DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

# Managing Heart Disease

The term “heart disease” encompasses a wide variety of heart conditions, so it’s important to talk with a doctor to understand your symptoms. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

## Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here’s what they mean.

<b>Atria</b>	The right atrium and left atrium (together called the atria of the heart) are the two smaller cardiac chambers. The right atrium holds the oxygen-poor blood returning to the heart from most of the body until the right ventricle is ready to receive it. The left atrium holds the oxygen-rich blood returning from the lungs until the left ventricle is ready to receive it.
<b>Ventricles</b>	The two major pumping chambers of the heart. The right ventricle pumps oxygen-poor blood out to the lungs. The left ventricle pumps oxygen-rich blood (that has returned to the heart from the lungs) out to the body.
<b>Cardiac Valves</b>	The four cardiac valves—the tricuspid, pulmonic, mitral, and aortic valves—assure that as the heart beats, blood moves through the cardiac chambers in the correct direction, and that it does not flow “backwards” in the wrong direction.
<b>Coronary Arteries</b>	The blood vessels that supply oxygen-rich blood to the heart muscle.
<b>Cardiac Arrhythmia</b>	An abnormal heart rhythm, caused by a problem in the heart’s electrical system. Arrhythmias can produce heart rates that are too slow (bradycardia), too fast (tachycardia), or that are in the normal range. Some cardiac arrhythmias are inconsequential, while others cause symptoms varying between minor and potentially fatal.
<b>Coronary Artery Disease (CAD)</b>	A condition in which the lining of the coronary arteries develop plaques (caused by atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries) which can partially or completely block the flow of blood to the heart muscle.
<b>Myocardial Infarction</b>	An event also known as a heart attack that is characterized by death of a portion of the heart muscle. The vast majority of myocardial infarctions are caused by the sudden rupture of a coronary artery plaque, which can cut off the blood supply to the heart muscle supplied by the affected artery.
<b>Heart Failure</b>	The condition in which, because of one or more types of heart disease, cardiac function is reduced to the point where the heart is no longer able to perform all the work necessary to keep up with all the body’s needs. People with heart failure often have shortness of breath, swelling of the legs, weakness, poor exercise tolerance, and a reduced life expectancy.



### Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage heart disease.

#### About Symptoms

- What symptoms should I look for to know whether to alert you or call you for advice?
- What symptoms might I experience that should cause me to go to the emergency department or call 911?

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#### About Causes & Risk Factors

- What underlying problem or condition caused my heart disease?
- What should be doing to stop or reverse the underlying problem that has led to my heart disease?
- Is my blood pressure optimal?
- Do I need to lose weight?

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#### About Diagnosis

- What is the specific nature of my heart disease?
- What tests should be done to confirm the diagnosis, and to make sure we know all we can about my heart problem?

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#### About Treatment

- Should I take my medications all at once, or space them out?
- What side effects do you want me to watch out for?
- What should I do if I forget to take a dose of one of my medicines?
- Is there the possibility of surgery, an implantable medical device, or invasive procedure that might improve my condition?

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#### About Living With Heart Disease

- What limitations, if any, do I have on my activities?

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