

Blue Pill *or* Red Pill

TAKING DRUGS THE RIGHT WAY

Will it be the blue pill or the red pill? Those kinds of pills are best left to the imagination. More scientifically, pills are made to cause a certain effect when consumed – pills to heighten the senses and hallucinate, pills to help one sleep, pills to prevent pregnancy, pills to cure diseases, and pills to increase vitality.

Pills to medicate are readily available everywhere today. There are over-the-counter (OTC) drugs that you can readily purchase without a prescription. Some OTC medicines are to cure a cough, relieve headaches, and prevent tooth decay. In matters of the heart, it's always a prescribed medication intended for use by one individual patient to treat a specific condition.

Medication always goes hand in hand to complement the treatment plan but taken incorrectly may do more harm than good. There are many routes to administer drugs. Each route has specific purposes, pros, and cons. Even the medication frequency, timing, and dosage are calculated precisely for the patient's needs, history, and response to the drug. But understand that the main objective is to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the drug in your body.



When you are diagnosed with valvular heart disease (VHD), your doctor may recommend a 'Watch and Wait' to see if your symptoms progress further. In scenarios as such, your doctor may prescribe medications to relieve those symptoms. These are some types of medications to relieve heart valve disease symptoms but are not limited to:

ACE INHIBITORS commonly prescribed to treat high blood pressure to allow your blood vessels to open more fully to slow down heart failure.

ANTI-ARRHYTHMIC MEDICATIONS helps to restore a normal heart-pumping rhythm.

BETA-BLOCKERS work by blocking the effects of adrenaline, causing your heart to beat more slowly and reduce heart palpitations.

DIURETICS, "WATER PILLS" reduces the amount of fluid in the tissues and bloodstream and expelled from the body as urine. By doing so, helps lessen the workload for the heart and lowers blood pressure.

VASODILATORS are designed to dilate blood vessels, allowing blood to flow in a forward direction, rather than being forced backward through a leaky valve.

Medications cannot always protect your heart and your diseased heart valve may continue to damage or weaken your heart if not treated accordingly. If your condition is not getting better after taking the medication, your doctor will recommend treatment options to repair or replace the diseased valve. There are highly effective treatment options available to treat VHD, such as open-heart surgery, or minimally invasive options such as Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation (TAVI) or MitraClip, and balloon valvuloplasty.

EACH TYPE OF
MEDICATION HAS A
SPECIFIC FUNCTION TO
DISSOLVE BLOOD
CLOTS OR PREVENT
THE FORMING OF A
BLOCKED BLOOD
VESSEL LEADING
TO BLEEDING
COMPLICATIONS,
A HEART ATTACK,
OR A STROKE.

PREPARING FOR TREATMENT

Make sure to inform your doctor of any medications that you may be consuming as some medication will have adverse effects on other medications. Your doctor may also advise you to stop taking some medications like antiplatelets and anticoagulants a few days before your scheduled procedure or surgery.

PRE-PROCEDURE

A general or local anesthetic may be administered before the procedure.

POST-PROCEDURE

Your medication plan will differ based on the type of treatment you have chosen. Mechanical valve replacement requires one to consume a blood-thinning medication, Warfarin for life. This is to ensure no blood clot formation that will lead to a stroke. As Warfarin is an anticoagulant that interacts with vitamin K, your dietitian will advise you to stick to a Warfarin-friendly diet to balance the amount of vitamin K in your body.

However, with a tissue repair or replacement, you will be prescribed Warfarin as well but it will not be lifelong, only as it necessitates – 2-3 weeks at most. Other types of medications like antithrombotic and antiplatelets may also be prescribed together to treat specific conditions. These types of medication have a specific function to dissolve blood clots or

prevent the forming of a blocked blood vessel leading to bleeding complications, a heart attack or a stroke.

On other rare occasions, after the surgery or procedure, you may experience heart arrhythmia which means heart rhythm abnormality where your heart beats irregularly causing you to experience heart palpitations. Your doctor may prescribe an anti-arrhythmic medication with a combination of beta-blockers to regulate and slow down your heartbeat if the condition persists.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Follow up closely with your doctor to monitor if the repaired or replaced heart valve is working well. Based on your progress and stats, your doctor may reduce or discontinue your medications if you are no longer experiencing any VHD symptoms.