

*“I knew replacing my diseased valve was the way to go, but which one should I choose?”*



As a 55-year-old woman, visiting your doctor for a routine appointment can be unpredictable. Nothing seems out of the ordinary until your doctor suspects that you have valvular heart disease (VHD).

Dealing with VHD can be a daunting experience. Remember, you are never alone. Your doctor will constantly be with you through this life-changing journey. To survive this journey a better understanding of the disease including the ways to deal with it is fundamental.

Numerous questions must be going through your head now. Together, let's take it one step at a time.

*How do I survive this?*

**When you are diagnosed with VHD, you will need regular follow up and monitoring with your cardiologist. Most patients live a blissful long life without requiring any surgery.**

*I am now in my 50s with VHD, what are my options?*

First, your doctor will initiate medications to relieve your symptoms. However, when the disease becomes severe even with medications, your doctor will recommend a valve replacement.

There are two types of valve replacement – mechanical and tissue. The type of valve will have an impact on your everyday life. The ultimate goal is to improve symptoms and quality of life while minimizing complications.

*How long can I survive with mechanical or tissue valve?*

**Mechanical valves are made from a special type of carbon or titanium. They are known for their durability and longevity. These valves are everlasting, usually more than 20 years.**

**Now let's talk about tissue valves. They originate from animal donors' valves or other animal tissue that are sturdy and flexible. Tissue valves last usually 10-20 years and usually do not necessitate the long-term use of any medications.**

## SURVIVING VALVULAR HEART DISEASE

### MECHANICAL OR TISSUE?

*What are the risks of another surgery for me?*

Mechanical valves will typically last lifelong, hence a single replacement surgery will suffice. However, if you opt for tissue valve replacement, bear in mind you might need an additional valve replacement surgery if you live beyond the valve's lifespan.

*What are the key lifestyle changes I have to make?*

**If your choice is a mechanical valve, your life will certainly change. Everyday for your entire life, you will have to take a blood-thinning medication**

**called warfarin. This medication will prevent blood clots forming in the valve flaps, which may dissipate and travel through the bloodstream leading to a stroke or heart attack. You will also have to take precautions including playing contact sports and adhering to a strict warfarin diet. Not to worry, even though warfarin does increase the bleeding risk, but with thorough monitoring, the risk is much limited.**

*As a mother I am concerned, should my children go for VHD screening?*

The genetic risk of VHD, particularly aortic stenosis does increase if a first-degree relative has the disease. This includes congenital heart disease which occurs when a heart defect is present since birth. In this current millennial age, systematic screening is the best approach. Hence, if your children have symptoms of VHD, they should seek a doctor's advice.

*Finally, what is the best choice for me?*

**Age has been the main factor when choosing between the two valve types. Neither mechanical nor tissue valves will guarantee a lifetime survival or fewer complications. In general, both types of replacement valve functions well. Be sure to discuss with your doctor every step of the way in the hunt for the most fitting valve replacement for you. Nevertheless, you have the most important say in this life-changing decision.**