

# MVP: Mitral Valve Prolapse The Heart With a Different Beat

By Harcham Chann, M.D.

Mary M. Is having fun at a dinner party with her husband. Suddenly, her heart starts beating very fast. She is frightened, asking herself, "Am I having a heart attack?"

Recently diagnosed as having mitral valve prolapse (MVP), Mary's fear is caused by the fact that her symptoms at the dinner party definitely feel like those of a heart attack. A person with MVP can experience such symptoms, or they may have no symptoms at all.

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more common in women between the ages of 20 and 40 (in fact, studies have shown that at least six percent of all women have MVP), but men have it, too. MVP tends to run in families.

MVP is also known as the Click-Murmur Syndrome (because of the sound the valve makes when it flops backwards), Barlow's Syndrome (for the doctor who first reported MVP), Balloon Mitral Valve and Floppy Valve Syndrome.

Symptoms of MVP include heart palpitations, such as those experienced by Mary (50%), chest pain (50%), lightheadedness (12%), and fainting spells (4%). A very few patients with MVP may tire easily or experience shortness of breath. However, as mentioned previously, there may be no symptoms at all.

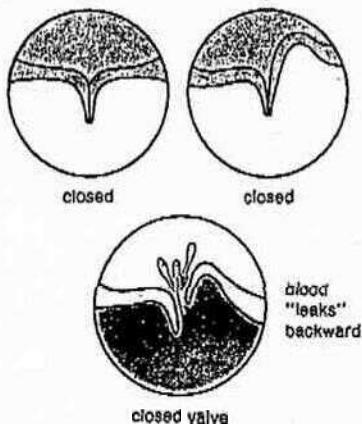
To understand what MVP is, it is good to remember that your heart is a pump with four chambers (atria), and two are pumping chambers (ventricles). The blood which has been circulating throughout your body enters your heart in the right atrium; passes through your tricuspid valve into your right ventricle and is then pumped through the pulmonary valve into your lungs where it releases carbon dioxide and picks up oxygen. From there it fills

up the left atrium, then moves through the mitral valve to the left ventricle, where it is pumped through the aortic valve into the aorta and then to the rest of the body.

In MVP, One or both valve flaps are enlarged and some of their supporting strings "are 100" long. So when the heart contracts or pumps, the mitral valve flaps do not close smoothly or evenly. Instead, part of one or both flaps collapses backward into the left atrium. This sometimes allows a small amount of blood to leak backward through the valve.

Complications with mitral valve prolapse are very rare, but they do occur and can include a great many irregular heart beats (to have a few is normal), severe chest pain, or heart infection. If you have MVP, it is very important that a physician check you periodically to see if

Action of normal valve      Action of prolapsed mitral valve



you are at risk for such complications. Again, most people have no problems - listen to your doctor!

It is your doctor who, most often, will find evidence of possible MVP during a physical examination. If it is felt further tests are advisable, you may be given an echocardiogram, electrocardiogram, Holter Monitor test or treadmill test.

An echocardiogram (an echo is the test most frequently used to determine if you have mitral valve prolapse) is painless, takes only about an hour, and uses sound waves (ultrasound) to look at the various valves of the heart to see how they are working. Also painless, an electrocardiogram (EKG or ECC) takes only a few minutes and is often done to record how well your heart is beating. The Holter Monitor is a 24-hour recording of your heartbeat during your daily routines. Slick patches (electrodes) are placed on your chest. There is a small recorder that

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is worn by the patient on his belt or carried on a shoulder strap which records your heartbeat every minute of the day. This test tells how your heart is beating when you are feeling symptoms and when you are not. A treadmill test - which is usually done on a moving belt - records your heartbeat and shows how well your heart responds to exercise. In rare cases, your doctor may also recommend that you have further testing done on your heart.

According to the American Heart Association, the overwhelming majority of patients with MVP have no symptoms, will have no problems and, therefore, will need no treatment. However, those who have leaky or regurgitant prolapsing valves may need antibiotics for prevention of infection of the valve during surgery or dental treatment. In addition, medicine may be used in a small number of MVP patients with chest pain or abnormal heart rhythms. Most patients enjoy active lives without any restrictions, but it's a good idea to consult your doctor about the activity level that's safest for you.

Mitral valve prolapse, in general, is not a serious condition and, once you know the exact nature of your symptoms and realize that a heart attack is not impending, your anxieties are alleviated and the symptoms tend to improve. In fact, with the anxiety and stress minimized, symptoms sometimes completely disappear.

Knowing what to expect from your health goes a long way towards helping you to live a full, active life and to increase the quality of your life.



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