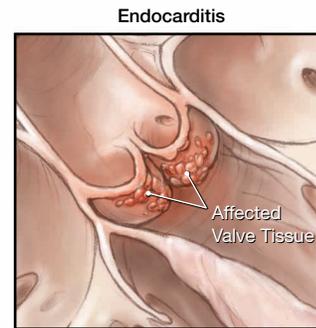
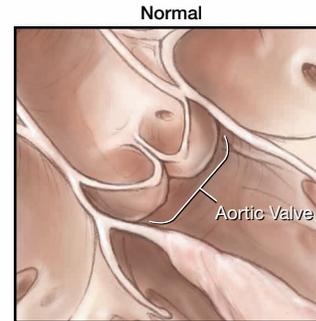
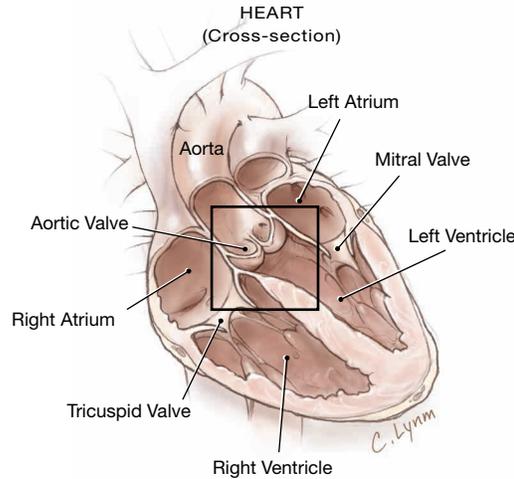


# Endocarditis

**E**ndocarditis is an infection or inflammation (response to injury of the cells) of the valves of the heart or of the **endocardium**, the inner lining of the heart chambers. Endocarditis is a serious condition that can cause heart failure, stroke, kidney failure, and death. Fortunately, it can be successfully treated in most people. The July 3, 2002, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about endocarditis.



## TYPES OF ENDOCARDITIS

Endocarditis typically occurs when bacteria enter the bloodstream and then settle on the heart valves. Individuals who have preexisting heart valve problems and persons who have had heart valve operations are at increased risk. Some people get endocarditis from bacteria in the mouth that enter the bloodstream during dental procedures. Unsterile injections by drug abusers also can release bacteria into the blood. For individuals with increased risk, taking antibiotics before medical and dental procedures may reduce the chances of getting endocarditis.

- **Bacterial endocarditis** is caused by bacteria that have entered the bloodstream.
- **Fungal endocarditis** usually occurs in individuals who have low resistance to infection, such as those who are taking medications that suppress the immune system.
- **Noninfective endocarditis** is inflammation in the heart that can be caused by advanced stages of cancer and by some disorders of the immune system.

## SYMPTOMS OF ENDOCARDITIS

- Fever and chills
- Drenching night sweats
- Fatigue
- Weight loss
- Shortness of breath and persistent cough
- Pain in the joints
- Bleeding under the fingernails, causing red lines
- **Petechiae**, which are tiny purple-red spots under the skin

## TREATMENT

Bacterial endocarditis is treated with antibiotics, usually **intravenously** (administered through the veins) and usually for an extended period (up to 6 weeks). In severe cases in which the heart valves become damaged, surgery may be necessary.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Heart Association  
800/242-8721  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute  
(National Institutes of Health)  
301/592-8573  
[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on *JAMA*'s Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). A Patient Page on heart failure was published in the February 6, 2002, issue.

Sources: American College of Cardiology, American Heart Association, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

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