

What is Mitral Valve Prolapse?

Mitral Valve Prolapse or MVP is a very common condition that is seldom serious, It occurs in about 5% of the population, with females being affected a little more than males. It can occur in families. It seems to be a little more common in tall, thin people. It is frequently associated with Marfan Syndrome

Most people with MVP have no symptoms and it is found on routine exam because of a funny noise their heart makes. This has sometimes been described as a click . Sometimes there can be a murmur. Some people have episodes of chest pain, which can vary quite a bit. It can be described as a sharp, stabbing pain over the left chest. It can be described as a pressure sensation. It is usually short in duration only lasting a few minutes. It can last 20 to 30 minutes. The pain seems to be made worse by fatigue and stress. It is not necessarily related to exercise. Some people experience extra heartbeats (PVC) or runs of fast heartbeats. This is also called palpitations. These can be very uncomfortable, but very rarely life threatening. For reasons that are not clear, some people with MVP also tend to get headaches and seem to have more problems with fatigue.

Mitral valve Prolapse is where the Mitral valve leaflets stretch as they close. Normally, the leaflets of the Mitral valve are tethered to the left ventricle by small muscles called papillary muscles. When the left ventricle contracts (or squeezes) the two leaflets of the Mitral Valve come together to keep the blood from going back to the Left Atrium. These papillary muscles keep the leaflets from moving too far. Sometimes the leaflets of the valve are thickened. When the Mitral Valve prolapses (stretches toward the left atrium) these muscles are stretched slightly and can cause the pain or fast heart beat. If the leaflets stretch far enough, the valve will leak. Even though the pain can be severe, there is no harm occurring to the heart. THIS IS NOT A HEART ATTACK!!

MVP is usually diagnosed by physical exam. We will use the echocardiogram to confirm the diagnosis, as this is usually a more sensitive test. There can sometimes be false positives and false negatives with the echocardiogram.

There are medications that can help ease the symptoms of MVP. These are called Inderal and Tenormin. These medications act by slowing down the heart beat and slowing how fast the heart squeezes, thereby decreasing the tension on the papillary muscles. This is thought to ease the pain. These medications also can ease the symptoms of stress and this may contribute to the beneficial effects as well. Sometimes another medication called Verapamil can be helpful. It acts in a similar method and can be used in patients who also have asthma.

Very rarely (less than 1/2 %) will the valve continue to stretch with time and begin to leak severely and may need to be replaced. For this reason persons with MVP should be checked every two or three years to make sure the valve is not leaking. Also people with MVP are at a higher risk of developing an infection of the heart and for this reason the American Heart Association recommends that patients with MVP take antibiotics whenever they go to the dentist or have any kind of surgery.

If you have any questions please ask one to the doctors.