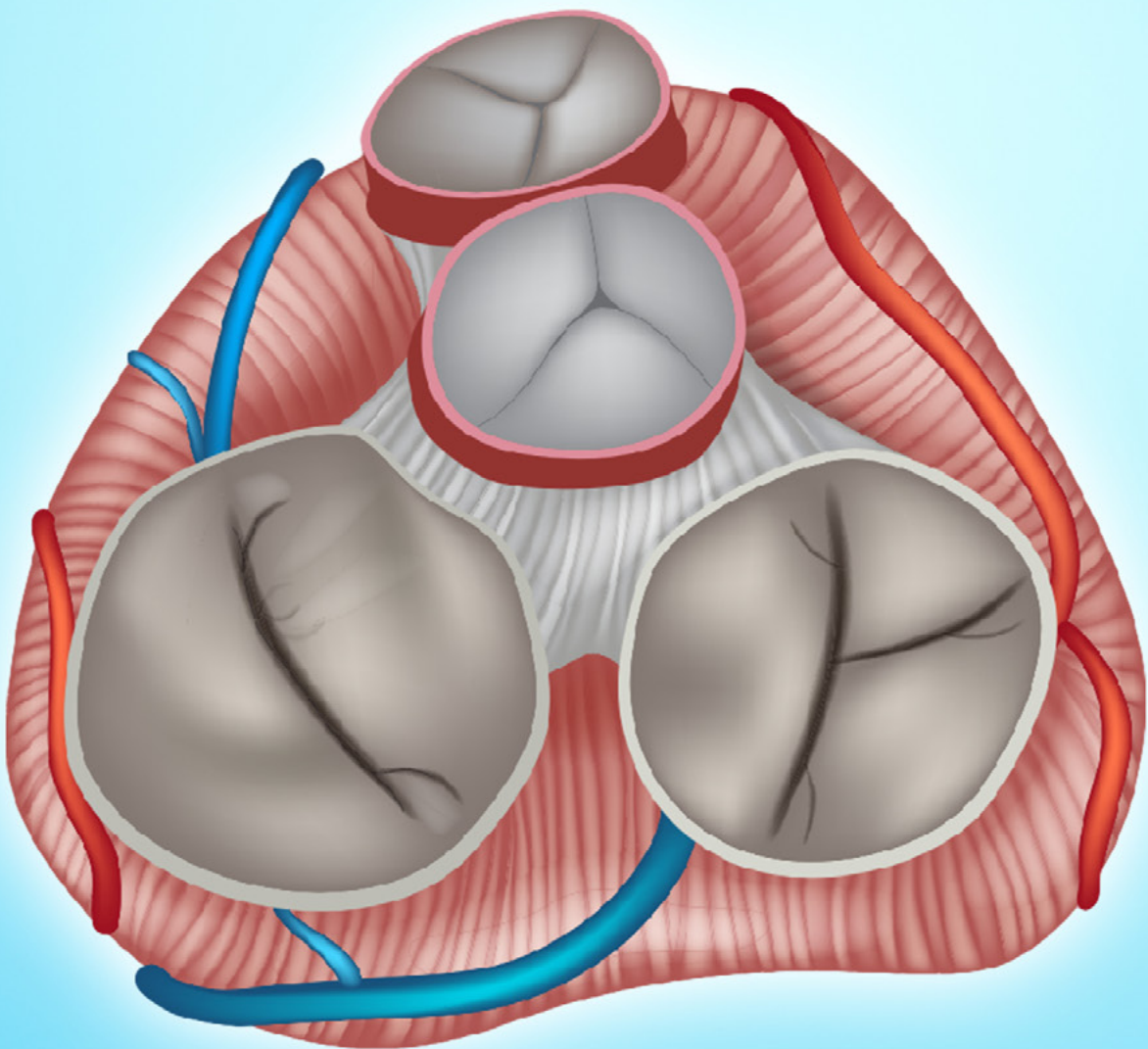


5 CRITICAL QUESTIONS ANSWERED

FOR HEART VALVE SURGERY PATIENTS



HeartValveSurgery.com Named #1 Heart Website!

We are happy to announce that HeartValveSurgery.com was just named the #1 Heart Disease Website by Feedspot for the **fifth consecutive year!** [Learn more.](#)



To see patient reviews of HeartValveSurgery.com, please visit our new "Patient Reviews" page. [See 300+ patient reviews here.](#)

5.0 Out of 5 Stars
★★★★★
Overall rating of 350 3rd-party reviews

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★★★★★
5 out of 5 stars
Google

Thomas Miers
May 28, 2025

Within the last year, I went through an ascending aorta aneurysm repair and aortic valve replacement. The information that was provided by Adam Pick t...

[Read More](#)

★★★★★
5 out of 5 stars
Google

Susanne Schalles
May 28, 2025

This website is truly amazing for people impacted by heart valve disease, including their family and friends who want more information. Thank you Adam...

[Read More](#)

★★★★★
5 out of 5 stars
Google

Kurt Zacharias
May 22, 2025

Frequently referenced this website when preparing for my Ross procedure to treat my stenotic unicuspid aortic valve and aortic dilatation. Information...

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About the Former Patient & Author



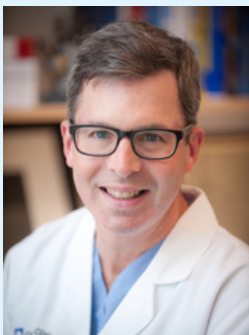
For his work as a patient advocate and a high technology consultant, [Adam Pick](#) has been featured by the American Heart Association, BusinessWeek, The Wall Street Journal and Medical News Today. A native and current resident of Los Angeles, Adam earned a bachelors and a graduate degree from the University of Michigan.

On November 3, 2005, Adam learned that he had severe valve disease and an enlarged heart. To treat his valvular defect, Adam needed double heart valve surgery. Eight weeks later, [Dr. Vaughn Starnes](#) performed aortic and pulmonary valve surgery on Adam at USC Medical Center.

As part of his experience, Adam learned the highs, the lows, the challenges, the opportunities and the frustrations of heart valve surgery. His book, [The Patient's Guide To Heart Valve Surgery](#), is Adam's personal attempt to support patients and caregivers through the entire heart valve surgery process - from diagnosis through recovery.

In addition to his book, Adam launched [HeartValveSurgery.com](#) to educate and empower patients. Since 2006, this website has helped over 10 million patients through heart valve surgery. Today, the website features a [surgeon finder](#), [a heart hospital directory](#), [Adam's blog](#), [educational videos](#), and a [patient community](#). On social media, [Adam's Facebook Page](#) about heart valve disease now has over 450,000 followers.

To help children born with congenital heart defects, Adam transformed this project into a charitable effort. Adam now donates a portion of proceeds to Gift of Life International, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing medical treatment to children facing life-threatening cardiac disease. [Learn more.](#)



"Adam's story is extraordinary... With his website, Adam filled an important gap for heart surgery patients. In addition to trusted information, Adam provides compassion, reassurance and connections among patients. This is a huge contribution to the welfare of patients everywhere."

--Dr. A. Marc Gillinov
Chairman of Cardiac Surgery
Cleveland Clinic

Some Opening Words...

As a heart valve patient, I can imagine what you may be going through right now. I can imagine that you may be confused. I can imagine that you may be nervous. I can imagine that you may be experiencing a unique type of fear that you have never felt before.

Several questions may be racing through your mind. Some of the questions I remember are:

- Why me?
- Do I really need to have heart valve surgery?
- Will I ever be the same again?
- How painful will the operation be?
- And the big question... Could I die?

While I could continue this list of questions -- for the next several pages -- I am not going to. Instead, I would like to use this excerpt -- from [The Patient's Guide To Heart Valve Surgery](#) -- to share "5 Critical Questions" that patients, their families and friends typically consider before-and-after heart valve surgery.

So you know... I personally identified these questions after interacting with thousands of patients, caregivers, surgeons, cardiologists and nurses since launching my website over 15 years ago.

Keep on tickin!!!

ADAM

P.S. That's my wife, Robyn, and our son, Ethan.



Critical Question #1

Is Heart Valve Surgery Safe?



I will never forget that first-and-only meeting with my cardiologist, Dr. Bad Bedside Manner.

After a ten-second review of my echocardiogram, the stoic doctor said smugly, "Huh! Why weren't you here last year? Or, two years ago for that matter? You need a new heart valve replacement. And, you need it soon."

The doctor then continued to tell me that my heart was already dilated (enlarged) and suffering from 'working overtime' as he phrased it.

I was numb in that moment. That 'numbness' would later turn into a tear-filled conversation with Robyn, my wife. We were both scared that my life... our life... would be negatively impacted by two, valvular disorders -- stenosis and regurgitation.

We were scared. We felt alone. And, we were very unclear about the facts specific to heart valve surgery.

So you know, my patient surveys and research suggests that feelings of fear and confusion are very common among patients. In fact, following a severe heart valve

diagnosis, patients often isolate themselves as the possibility of heart surgery may cast an ominous cloud over their future.

Stop The Fear, Uncertainty & Loneliness... Focus On The Facts!

Yes. There is good news to share. Patients do not need to succumb to these dark feelings once they understand the realities of heart valve surgery in 2022.

For me, the more I researched heart valve surgery, the more I was encouraged that I would be fine after surgery.



To help patients dispel their fear of heart valve surgery, I often provide them with these facts:

- Each year, over 300,000 heart valve surgery operations are performed around the world. The key points of this statistic are (i) you are not alone and (ii) you are not the first person to have this procedure performed.
- Medical technology is on your side! This is a transformational time for valvular treatment as new technologies are enhancing patient comfort with less invasive techniques including mini-sternotomy, mini-thoracotomy, robotics and catheter-based devices.
- In a recent survey, 72 percent of patients surveyed suggested that heart valve surgery generated a “positive impact” in their lives!

- To help you connect with other patients and minimize feelings of loneliness, please visit the [Patient Community at HeartValveSurgery.com](#). There, you will find a unique social network of patients and caregivers designed to enhance communication, interaction and learning among people facing valvular disorders.
- Lastly... The mortality rate of heart valve surgery is only 1.5 percent, according to The Society of Thoracic Surgeons, a leading association of over 5,000 cardiac surgeons. At some clinics, including the Cleveland Clinic, the mortality rate is below 1.5% for certain procedures. As you can read at [this link](#), Northwestern Medicine just reported 0% mortality during its last 500 mitral valve repair surgeries for asymptomatic patients with a leaking heart valve.

It is true and tragic that a very small percentage of patients do not make it through the surgery. But, when you stop to think about it... Life is risk. From the moment you wake up in the morning, you are in a risky situation.

Consider the act of driving... I don't know about you, but I live in Los Angeles. The drivers here are crazy! At least once a week I yell out to someone, "What are you doing? Are you trying to kill me?"



Remember... You are not alone.

Remember... The odds of having a successful surgery are significantly in your favor.

Critical Question #2

Do I Need To Research My Surgical Options? The Surgeon? Hospital?



When Dr. Bad Bedside Manner diagnosed my heart valve disorder, I only understood about 10% of the medical terms he used during that conversation.

It felt like the cardiologist was speaking the foreign language of Urdu. I had no idea what stenosis, regurgitation, dilation or calcification meant.

To resolve my confusion, I began researching the anatomy of my heart and my heart valves. I really wanted to understand what was wrong. Plus, I wanted to know how surgery was going to make it right.

Over the years, I have learned that many patients are different than me. Some patients do not want to learn about their heart valve disease. Some patients do not want to learn about their treatment options. Some patients do not want to learn about their surgeons or their hospitals. Some patients, surprisingly, do not want to learn about anything.

Be Mindful of the “Medical System”

Instead of doing their homework, some patients let the “Medical System” take over. Unfortunately, the medical system can dictate a direct path to intervention without any thoughtful patient consideration.

Needless to say, it's a pretty big and intimidating system. But, it is critical that the patient or their care partner take the time to learn about their condition and ensure that the proper steps are taken to guarantee the best quality-of-life after surgery.

Barbara's Story.... Is Knowledge Power?

Here's a real-life example of a patient who did not do her homework and got caught up in the medical system.



At 68 years of age, Barbara, from South Dakota, was diagnosed with severe aortic stenosis. One night, Barbara called me. She was scared out of her mind.

Barbara was told by her local cardiologist and surgeon that she needed an aortic valve replacement using a mechanical valve replacement. Unfortunately, this option would require Barbara to be on blood thinners for the rest of her life.

Although I am not a doctor, this sounded like a terrible surgical approach. Given her age, health, and risk factors, I politely suggested to Barbara that she may want to research her options, including the newer transcatheter aortic valve replacement therapies (TAVR), and consider speaking with another medical team.

Long story short... Barbara read my book and spent time at HeartValveSurgery.com to learn more about heart valve surgery. Then, Barbara changed surgeons. Barbara changed hospitals. And, Barbara decided against a mechanical heart valve replacement. Instead, she selected a cow valve that will not require any post-operative, drug therapy.

The really great news... Barbara is doing GREAT after her aortic valve surgery!



Please take the time to do your homework – learn about your heart, learn about your surgical options, learn about your doctor, and learn about your hospital.

Critical Question #3

Should I Get A Second Opinion?

After my primary diagnosis from my cardiologist, Dr. Bad Bedside Manner, I wasted no time getting a second opinion for two reasons. First, I didn't like the guy. Second, I wanted to be 100% confident in the diagnosis.

After I received a second opinion from my new cardiologist, Dr. Michael Chaikan, there was consensus. I needed heart valve surgery in a very short timeframe. My heart was dilated and I suffered from stenosis and regurgitation.

Since starting HeartValveSurgery.com fifteen years ago, I have learned that this "Second Everything" approach is not followed by many patients. In fact, I recently conducted a survey of heart valve surgery patients to learn more about this topic.

In the survey, I asked patients, "Did you get a second opinion to confirm your heart valve defect or disease?"

I was alarmed when I learned the results.

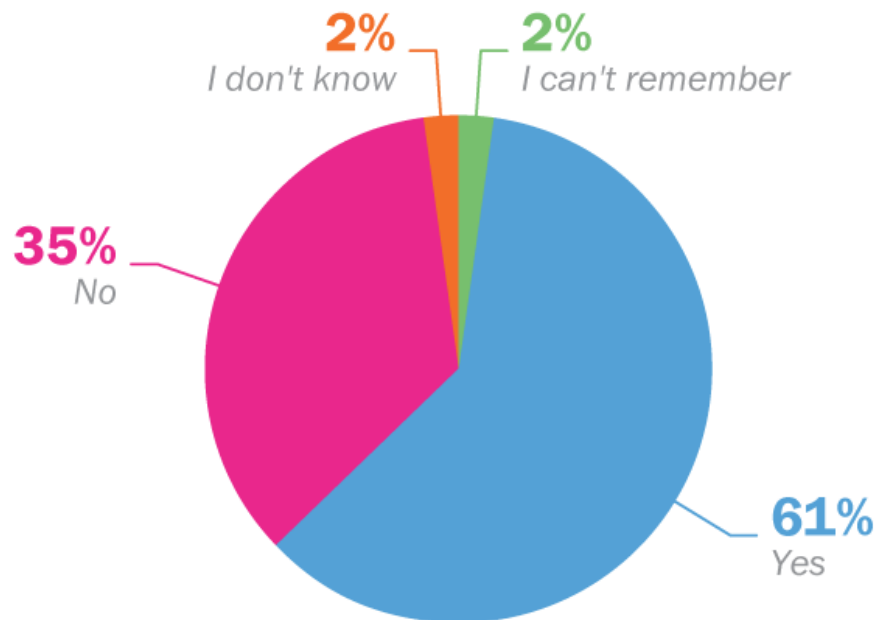
While the majority of patients responded "Yes" to that question, 35 percent of patients said, "No". For me, this was an important finding that highlighted a significant and potentially devastating scenario for patients.

"Why is Adam so sensitive about second opinions?" you might be wondering.

So you know, I have spoke with many patients who DID NOT NEED surgery AFTER getting a second opinion. That's right!!!

Do Heart Valve Surgery Patients Get A Second Opinion?

(Source: www.HeartValveSurgery.com)



Consider what Mike, 47, wrote to me, "Adam - Lucky for me, my girlfriend's cousin is a doctor at a cardiac hospital. During my second opinion, I was so surprised at how much time these doctors spent with me compared to the doctors at my other hospital. After these doctors put me through their tests, they came to the conclusion that I do not need the surgery at this time. I feel much more confident with the care I am receiving with my new medical team. I was shocked to read in your book that 35% of patients did not get a second opinion."

Mike is not alone. I have heard similar stories from Sara, Ben, Taylor and many other patients.



Please consider getting a second opinion prior to heart valve surgery. You want to be 100% confident that surgery is required when you are being rolled into the operating room.

Critical Question #4

What Should I Ask My Surgeon When We Meet?



When a second opinion confirms that you need surgery, it's time to meet with your potential surgeons.

While I investigated several surgeons across the country, two local names continued to appear in my research. Personally, I wanted to meet with each surgeon to learn more about them. I also wanted to hear their thoughts about (i) my situation, (ii) the surgical options available to me, and (iii) their surgical outcomes.

Before my interviews, I prepared a list of questions to review with each doctor.

Interestingly... The more I talked with other patients about their surgeon interviews, the more I learned they were NOT prepared for those meetings. Patients shared with me that they felt “intimidated”, “not smart enough”, and “unable to discuss treatment options” with their doctors.

For this reason, I created a list of questions to help patients learn about their surgeons, their surgical options and, most importantly, surgical outcomes.

As you will see below, this list consists of open-ended questions. I want the doctors to explain their thoughts rather than answer with a simple 'yes' or 'no' response.

Here are some of the questions from my list:

- Why do you think I need surgery?
- What type of treatment do you recommend? Why?
- What are your patient outcomes for that specific type of treatment?
- Are there any other less-invasive treatments to consider? What are they?
- How long have you been performing heart valve surgery?
- How many heart valve surgeries have you performed?
- Do you specialize in aortic, mitral, tricuspid or pulmonary therapy?
- How often do you treat patients with my specific form of heart disease?
- What are my greatest risks from a heart valve operation? How do you manage those risks?
- What do you expect as the best result from this operation? Why?
- What can you tell me about the recovery from heart valve surgery?
- Do you think I will need another operation in the future? Why?
- How should I think about the lifetime management of heart valve disease?



"Don't be afraid to ask questions. No question is un-important as long as it helps you get ready for things to come. Read as much as you can to become as familiar with your procedures and options. The better prepared you are... The better your experience will be."

-- Dewayne Epley, Patient

- What else should I know about you and your team that might help me make a decision?

You Want An Experienced Surgeon... So, Ask For Their Outcomes!

It is very important that you ask your surgeon about their surgical results for all cardiac procedures -- especially the heart valve operation you require.

Today, more than ever, there is a push for cardiac surgeons and heart teams to publish their patient outcomes. Several leading cardiac care facilities, surgeons and cardiologists believe this is an appropriate and responsible action.

[Dr. Marc Gerdisch](#), a leading cardiac surgeon who has performed over 4,000 heart valve procedures, recently shared this with me:



"It is really important for patients to research their surgeons and their outcomes. Patients should understand the surgeon's track record for the specific operation they need."

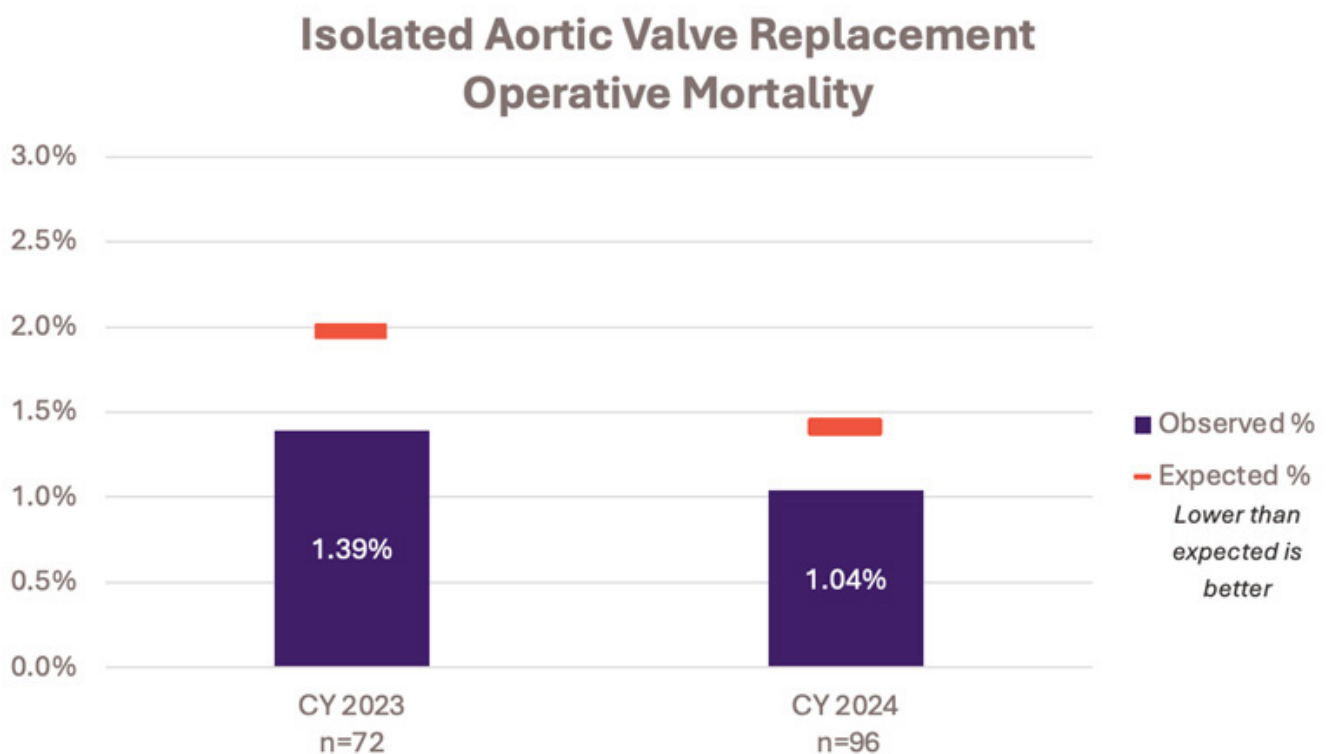
--Dr. Marc Gerdisch
Chief of Cardiac Surgery
Franciscan Health

To support Dr. Gerdisch's emphasis on outcomes, many cardiac centers now make their surgical outcomes available to patients. All you need to do is ask or do some research. For example, in the [Surgeon Finder](#) and the [Heart Hospitals Directory](#) at HeartValveSurgery.com, you can see surgical outcomes for several cardiac centers including [Northwestern Medicine](#).

On the next page, you will see an example from Northwestern's recent surgical outcomes report which shows 1.04% in-hospital mortality rate in 2024 for surgical aortic valve replacement (SAVR). The SAVR mortality rate at Northwestern has consistently performed better than expected.

Example of Surgical Outcomes Report For Heart Valve Surgery (2024 Northwestern Medicine Surgical Outcomes Report)

In-hospital Mortality Rate for Open Isolated Aortic Valve Replacement Surgeries at Northwestern Memorial Hospital



Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) Adult Cardiac Surgery Database

Critical Question #5

How Should I Prepare For Heart Valve Surgery Recovery?

If there is one thing I have learned over the years -- after speaking with thousands of patients -- it is that patients often overlook the realities and challenges of the recovery.

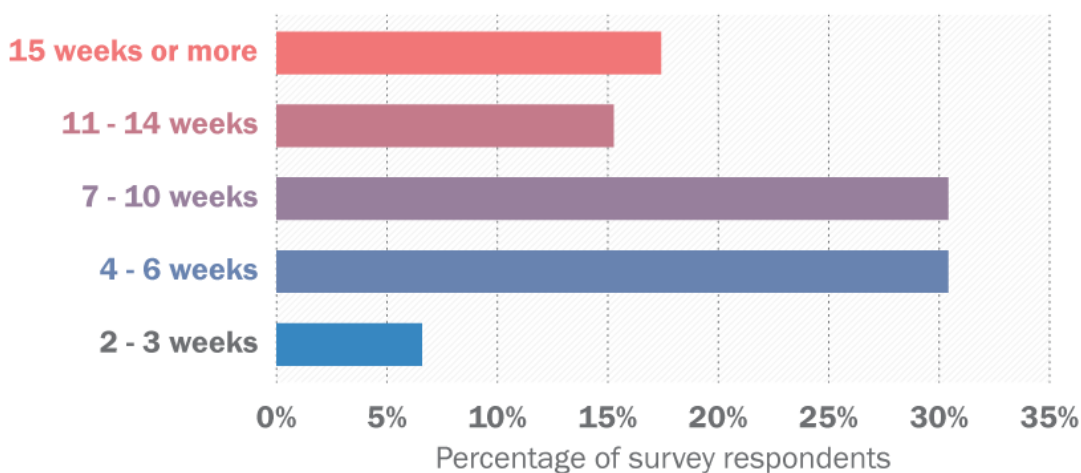
Often times, medical teams suggest to a heart valve surgery patient, "You'll be recovered in about eight weeks."

As my research indicates, this is simply not true. While it is true, that some patients have eventless recoveries without complications or pain, many patients have a unique recovery path -- as our bodies heal at different rates.

To better understand this, I surveyed over 100 patients about their recovery. As shown in the chart below, you can see that patient recovery times vary.

How Long Does It Take Patients To Return To Work After Surgery?

(Source: www.HeartValveSurgery.com)



Consider these patient comments from a post in my blog about the recovery from heart valve surgery.

- Shelby said, "I was fully recovered about six months after surgery. The first three months showed the greatest improvement... The next three months, I experienced a more gradual return to normality."
- Kathy said, "At 16 months post-op, I am just beginning to really feel like myself. I had some complications with my aortic valve replacement."
- Todd said, "I am 43 and had my mitral valve replaced on April 4, 2009. Now it's June 2 and I feel about 80-85%."
- Tom said, "I am now 6 months from mitral valve repair and single bypass. I feel like I am at 90%. The problem has been the healing of my split sternum. I am, however, playing golf again and walking 18 holes. I am 75 years old."

Establishing A Recovery Plan BEFORE Surgery

In 2022... The really great news is that thanks to medical advances (e.g. minimally-invasive techniques, catheter therapies, nerve blocks, rigid sternal fixation), patient recoveries are becoming much more comfortable and faster.

While it is my hope that your recovery is quick and pain-free, there are several potential issues that should be acknowledged and addressed prior to surgery. Again, I want you



"Don't gauge your surgery and recovery on others. Each surgery is unique and each patient will handle things in a different manner. It seems that patients strive to become normal as fast as they can. What is normal? We will forever be heart surgery patients."

-- Kathy Benson, Patient

and your support group to be fully prepared.

Some elements of your recovery plan should include:

- Managing your homecoming from the hospital
- The ongoing use of your incentive spirometer
- Appropriate pain medication consumption
- The signs of cardiac depression
- Monitoring recovery milestones
- Attending cardiac rehabilitation



Please take the time BEFORE your surgery to clearly understand the benefits of a thoughtful and well-planned recovery.

More Help Is Just A Few Clicks Away!

Dear Patient or Care Partner,

I hope the educational information and patient research provided in this eBook helped you learn more about heart valve surgery from the patient perspective.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to share these findings with you. If you are interested to learn more about the lifetime management and treatment of heart valve disease, I encourage you to visit HeartValveSurgery.com to use all the educational and interactive resources referenced on the next page.

Lastly... Although we may not know each other just yet, I want you to know that my thoughts and prayers are with you. I know that confronting the prospect of heart valve surgery can be uncomfortable. That said, you can always contact me with questions at adam@heartvalvesurgery.com. I am here to help!

Keep on tickin!

ADAM



If you have enjoyed this eBook, please turn to the next page to access more educational resources for patients.

Patient Resources

(You can click the blue links below.)



[Meet Patients In Our Community](#)

You are not alone. Meet thousands of patients -- just like you -- at our special community of patients and caregivers. This global community was designed to help you learn from other patients, stay connected with your family and friends, and empower you.



[Visit the Heart Valve Learning Center](#)

Access 4,000 pages of educational information about heart valve disease management and therapy.



[Find Trusted Heart Valve Surgeons](#)

Created by thousands of patients, caregivers, surgeons and cardiac centers, the Surgeon Finder is the world's only patient-recommended database of heart valve surgeons. You can search by location, by name, by problematic valve, and by surgical procedure.



[Research Leading Heart Hospitals](#)

To help you find and research leading cardiac centers that specialize in heart valve treatment, visit our new 'Heart Hospitals' section. With a few simple clicks, you can go on virtual tours, meet surgeons, see patient success stories and more.



[Visit Adam's Heart Valve Surgery Blog](#)

Ranked as the "No. 1 Heart Blog" by Feedspot, Adam Pick provides patients and caregivers the latest news, technology updates, patient tips, surgeon interviews and patient success stories at his blog.



[Watch Educational Videos](#)

With over 20 million views on YouTube, you can learn about heart valve disease, diagnosis and treatment options from the world's leading cardiologists and cardiac surgeons.

Thanks To Our Surgeon Team!!!

HeartValveSurgery.com would like to thank and acknowledge each of the following surgeons for their ongoing support of our community.



Dr. Kevin Accola

AdventHealth

Orlando, FL

[See Surgeon Profile](#)



Dr. David Adams

Mount Sinai Health

New York City, NY

[See Surgeon Profile](#)



Dr. Nimesh Desai

Penn Medicine

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

[See Surgeon Profile](#)



Dr. Joanna Chikwe

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

Los Angeles, CA

[See Surgeon Profile](#)

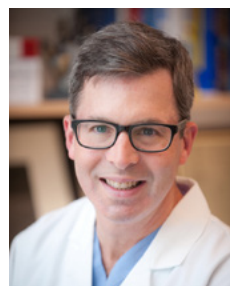


Dr. Marc Gerdisch

Franciscan Health

Indianapolis, IN

[See Surgeon Profile](#)



Dr. Marc Gillinov

Cleveland Clinic

Cleveland, OH

[See Surgeon Profile](#)



Dr. Patrick McCarthy

Northwestern Medicine

Chicago, IL

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Dr. Vaughn Starnes

University of Southern
California

Los Angeles, CA

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