



You May be at Risk for a Serious Infection



Bacterial endocarditis is an infection of the heart valves, major blood vessels or the lining of your heart chambers. If bacteria (germs) get into your bloodstream and attach to your heart, the infection can cause damage to your heart, especially your heart valves.

These germs can get into your body during dental or medical procedures, while getting tattoos or piercings, or during intravenous (IV) drug use. This is a serious infection that can spread beyond your heart. If left untreated, the infection can cause death.

Who is at Risk

People who have healthy hearts rarely get this infection. You are at risk if you:

- have a heart valve replacement or repair with artificial valves
- have had a heart transplant and develop abnormal heart valves
- have unrepaired cyanotic congenital heart disease
- have repaired congenital heart disease with artificial material
- or device (for 6 months after the procedure)
- use IV drugs
- have defects or leaks at or near a prosthetic device or patch
- have had bacterial endocarditis before.

bacterial endocarditis

Protect your heart from possible side effects of bacterial endocarditis that include:

- blood clots and stroke
- heart rhythm problems
- other infections in your body.

The best way to prevent it is by keeping your mouth healthy with good oral hygiene.



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Symptoms of Bacterial Endocarditis

Symptoms include:

- fever
- flu-like symptoms (cough, muscle or body aches, headache, chills, fatigue or feeling weak)
- weight loss
- night sweats
- red spots on the palms of your hands and soles of your feet.

Call your doctor right away if you have any new symptoms or if you feel like something is wrong.

How It is Treated

Your doctor will ask about your health history, give you an exam and order blood tests. You may need other tests, such as an echocardiogram. Bacterial endocarditis is treated with an antibiotic:

- Take it for as long as prescribed.
- Take it as directed.
- Do not change the dose or stop taking it without first talking with your doctor.

Other treatments may include heart surgery to repair or replace a heart valve or remove infected heart tissue. Your doctor will explain these options if you need them.

The American Heart Association created an endocarditis wallet card, available in English and Spanish. You should carry one if you are at higher risk and need antibiotics before a dental procedure. Go to heart.org and search for "bacterial endocarditis wallet card". Make sure you show your dentist your card.



Take Care of Your Mouth

The saliva in your mouth helps control plaque (bacteria that sticks to your teeth) and helps protect enamel on your teeth.

Keeping your teeth, gums, tongue and mouth healthy reduces your risk for infection. Poor dental hygiene can also lead to gum disease, bad breath or tooth loss.

- Get regular dental checkups.
- Brush your teeth at least 2 times each day. (Brush your tongue too!)
- Floss your teeth each day.
- Replace your toothbrush every 3 months.
- Talk with your doctor about taking antibiotics as a precaution before having any dental procedure.

