

## Lower Your Risk for Endocarditis

### *For congenital heart patients*

*This section of the Congenital Heart Conditions notebook explains endocarditis – what it is, how it occurs, its symptoms, and ways to prevent it.*

### What is endocarditis?

*Endocarditis* is an infection of the inner lining of the heart muscle. This lining is called the *endocardium*. The endocardium also covers the heart valves.

### How does endocarditis occur?

Bacteria may grow in areas where there is *turbulent blood flow* (where the flow may speed up or slow down). This can happen where a *shunt* or a *prosthetic heart valve* has been placed. The bacteria may settle and increase, and this can damage the tissue. It may also send infection into the bloodstream.

Foreign material, such as valves and tubes, or newly placed patches that may be inserted during heart surgery, may also be sources of infection. Skin infections or dental procedures (especially when mouth care is poor) can also bring germs into the bloodstream.

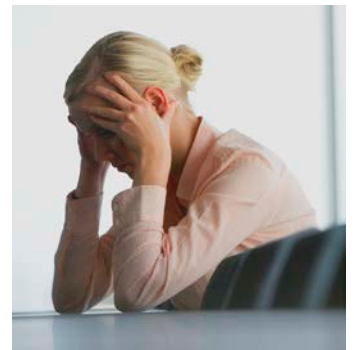
When endocarditis occurs, it requires a long hospital stay with treatment with *antibiotics* (germ-killing medicines). You may also need surgery.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of endocarditis include:

- Unexplained fever that does not go away
- Paleness
- Night sweats
- Unusual tiredness
- Weight loss
- Muscle or joint pain
- A general feeling of illness

If you have any of these symptoms, tell your doctor.



*Tell your doctor if you are unusually tired, or if you have any other symptoms listed here.*

## **How do I prevent endocarditis?**

To prevent endocarditis, the American Heart Association recommends using antibiotics before certain procedures, depending on your condition. Talk with your cardiologist to see if you should take antibiotics before you have certain procedures.

To prevent endocarditis, 1 dose of an antibiotic is usually given 1 hour before a dental procedure. With a high level of antibiotic in your bloodstream at the time of your procedure, the likelihood of infection is very small.

You can lower your risk of getting endocarditis by getting regular dental care and taking good care of your skin and nails.

### **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

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