

Heart valve repair surgery may ease mental health symptoms, too

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Researchers find procedure leads to reduced depression and anxiety.

(HealthDay)—People with a serious heart valve defect have less depression and anxiety after they undergo surgery to repair the problem, a new study finds.

The research included people with severe [mitral regurgitation](#), which occurs when the heart's mitral valve doesn't close tightly and blood flows backward into the heart. Past research has shown that one-quarter of patients with this defect have elevated levels of [anxiety and depression](#), according to the researchers.

The study looked at 131 patients who had [surgery](#) to correct the problem and compared them to 62 patients who didn't have surgery. They also compared the findings to a [control group](#) of 36 people with healthy hearts.

Six months after surgery, patients' levels of anxiety and depression and quality-of-life scores improved to the levels of people in the control group.

There was no such improvement among those who didn't have surgery to correct their [mitral valve](#) defect, according to the study.

Findings are published in the March issue of *The Annals of Thoracic Surgery*.

The researchers also found that [mental health](#) improved after surgery even in people who didn't have physical symptoms such as fatigue or shortness of breath before their operation. The type of surgery—standard or minimally invasive—didn't seem to make a difference in either.

"Early surgery in patients without symptoms or [abnormal heart function] has been previously considered as providing no direct patient benefit, but our study results show how wrong this concept is," study co-lead author Dr. Maurice Enriquez-Sarano, from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., said in a journal news release.

"Patients with a serious valve disease often suffer from the psychological consequences of leaving that disease untreated. Eliminating the [valve disease](#) reduces this suffering, further supporting the concept of early [valve] repair," he added.

The findings are important and warrant further investigation, Dr. Daniel Ulliyot, from the University of California, San Francisco, wrote in an accompanying commentary.

"We need to know if improved mental health is sustained beyond six months after surgery, and if the favorable impact of surgery is the result of restoring normal valve function or some other effect of surgical intervention," he explained.

More information: The American Heart Association has more about [heart valve problems](#).

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