

Mitral Stenosis

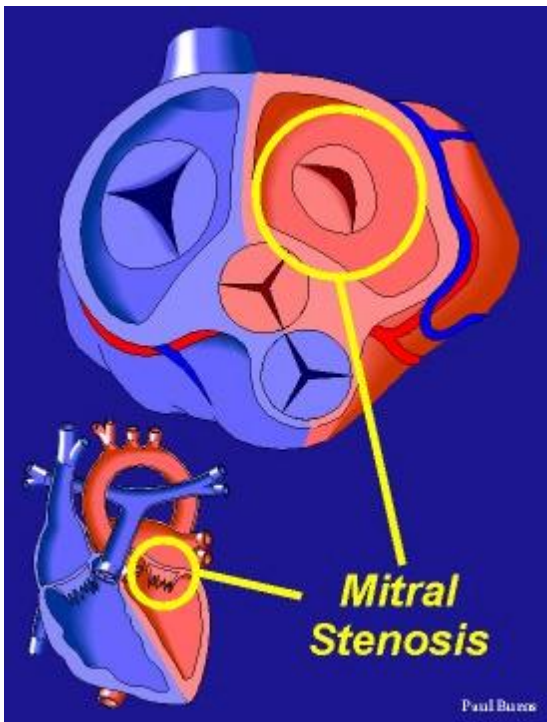


What Is It?

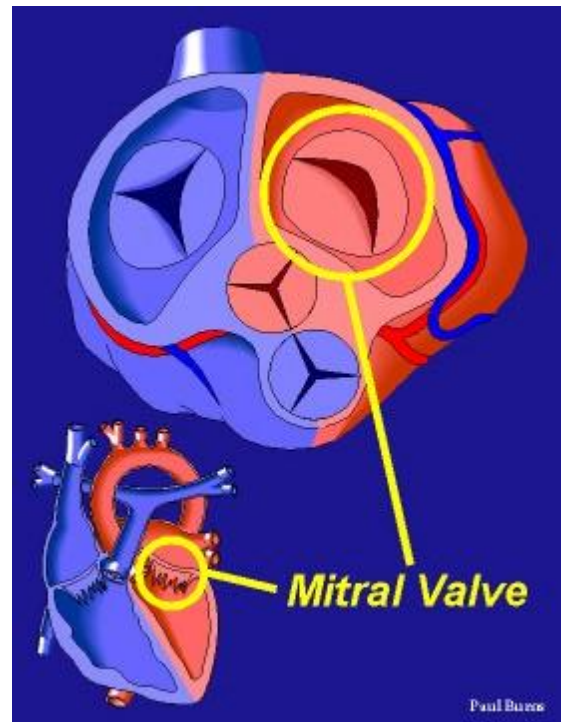
The Mitral Valve (circled in the illustration) regulates the movement of blood from the left atrium (LA), or left collecting chamber of the heart, into the left ventricle (LV), the main pumping chamber of the heart, which pumps blood to the body.

In Mitral Stenosis, the mitral valve is defective in form, with a blockage or narrowing that makes it difficult for blood to enter the left ventricle.

Mitral Stenosis, which is 4 times as likely to occur in females as in males, is almost always the result of scarring from Rheumatic Fever.



Mitral Stenosis



Normal Heart

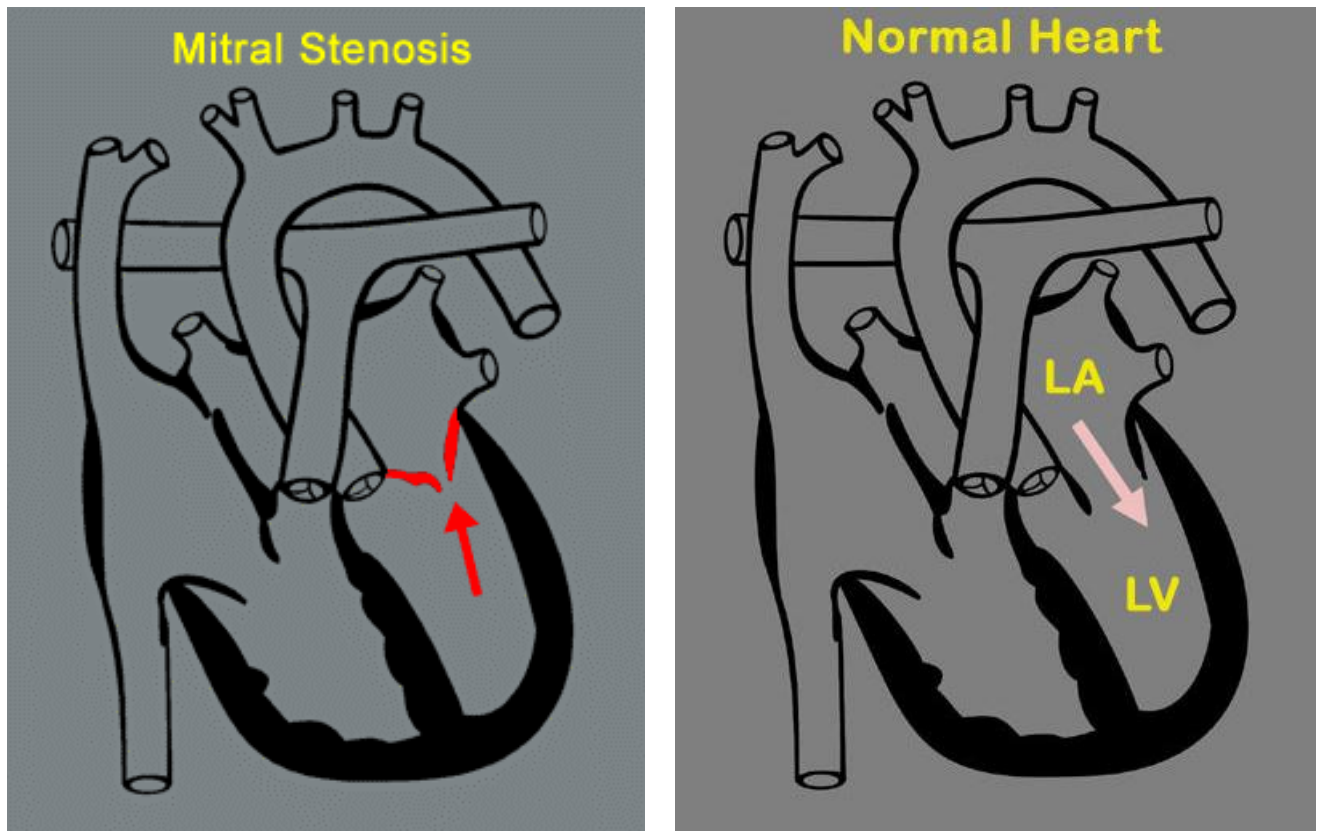
What Are Its Effects?

The abnormal mitral valve causes the right atrium to work harder than normal in order to pump its supply of blood into the left ventricle. The result is increased blood pressure in the left atrium and in the lungs, which send oxygen-rich blood to the left atrium.

The symptoms of Mitral Stenosis may be absent or very slight for long periods. However, they may gradually or suddenly worsen. If the blockage of the valve becomes severe, the left atrium will be unable to do its job adequately, blood will back up into the lungs and body tissues, and heart failure may ensue.

The adverse symptoms that can be caused by Mitral Stenosis often appear at times of stress, such as during strenuous exertion, in conjunction with a fever (when the heart pumps more vigorously), or when one is experiencing powerful emotions, such as fear.

These symptoms may include tiredness, lack of energy, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, heart palpitations, flushed cheeks, and a persistent cough, sometimes producing blood.



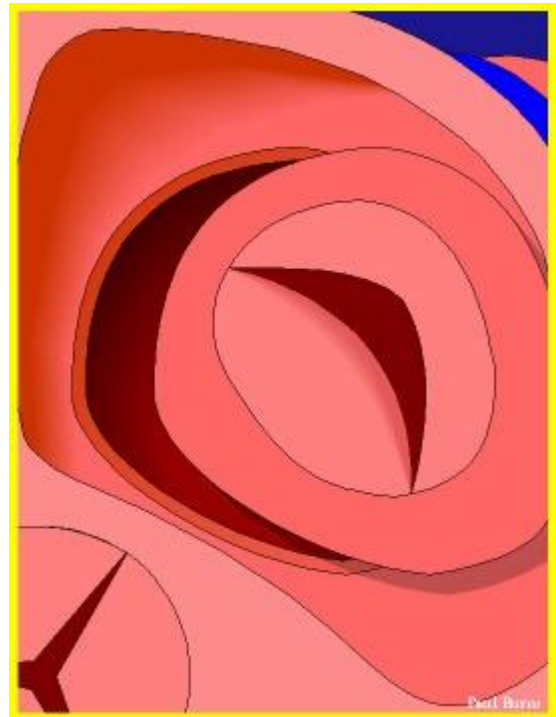
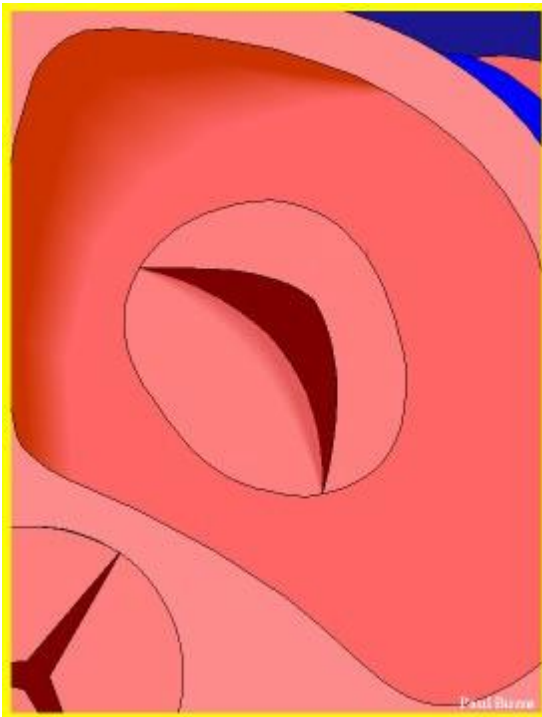
**Red Arrow Points at the Stenotic Mitral Valve.
The Pink Arrow Shows the Direction of Blood Flow.
LA = Left Atrium, LV = Left Ventricle**

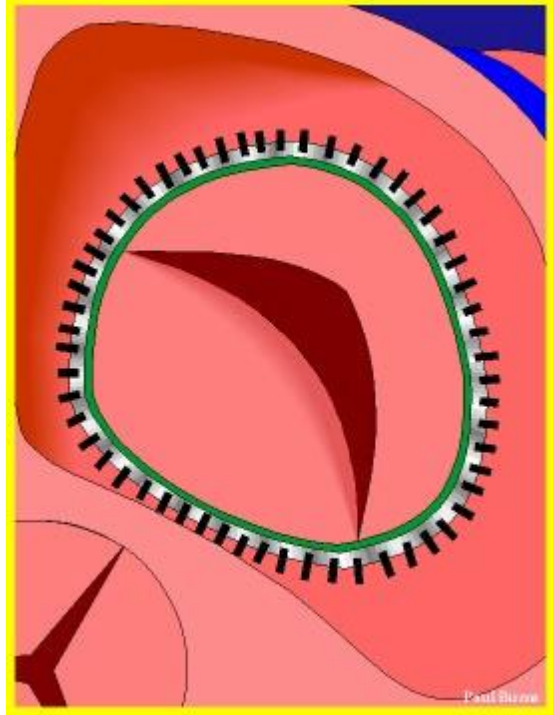
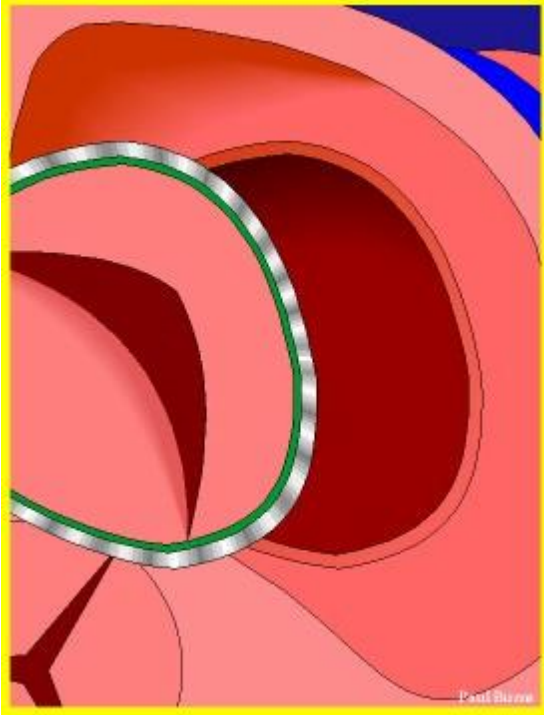
How Is It Treated?

If heart failure develops from Mitral Stenosis, it can be treated with medications. For example, a mild diuretic may be prescribed to reduce the amount of blood and other fluids that accumulate in the lungs and body tissues. Also, digitalis can make the heart beat more vigorously and control irregularities in its rhythm.

The retention of fluids can also be treated by following a diet that is low in salt, which encourages the body to retain water. Other behavioral steps that help mitigate the effects of Mitral Stenosis include moderate exercise and the avoidance of caffeine, smoking, stress, and excessive alcohol. Also, it is important to avoid or immediately treat blood infections that could attack the heart's valves.

If the mitral valve is seriously impaired, a valve replacement may be performed (see illustrations below). After this procedure, anticoagulants (blood-thinners) may be prescribed to prevent blood clots from forming.





Surgical Repair of Mitral Stenosis - Replacement of Valve